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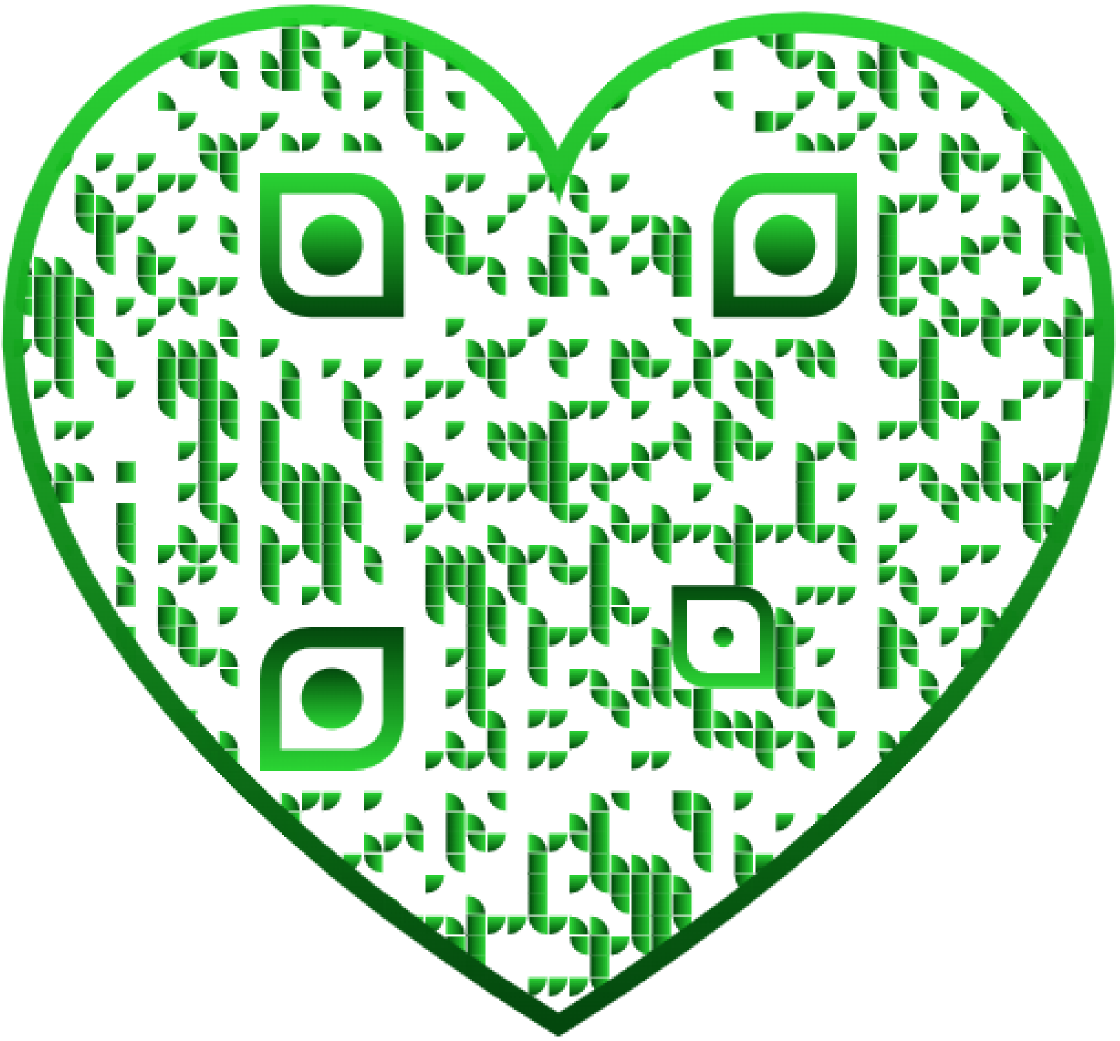

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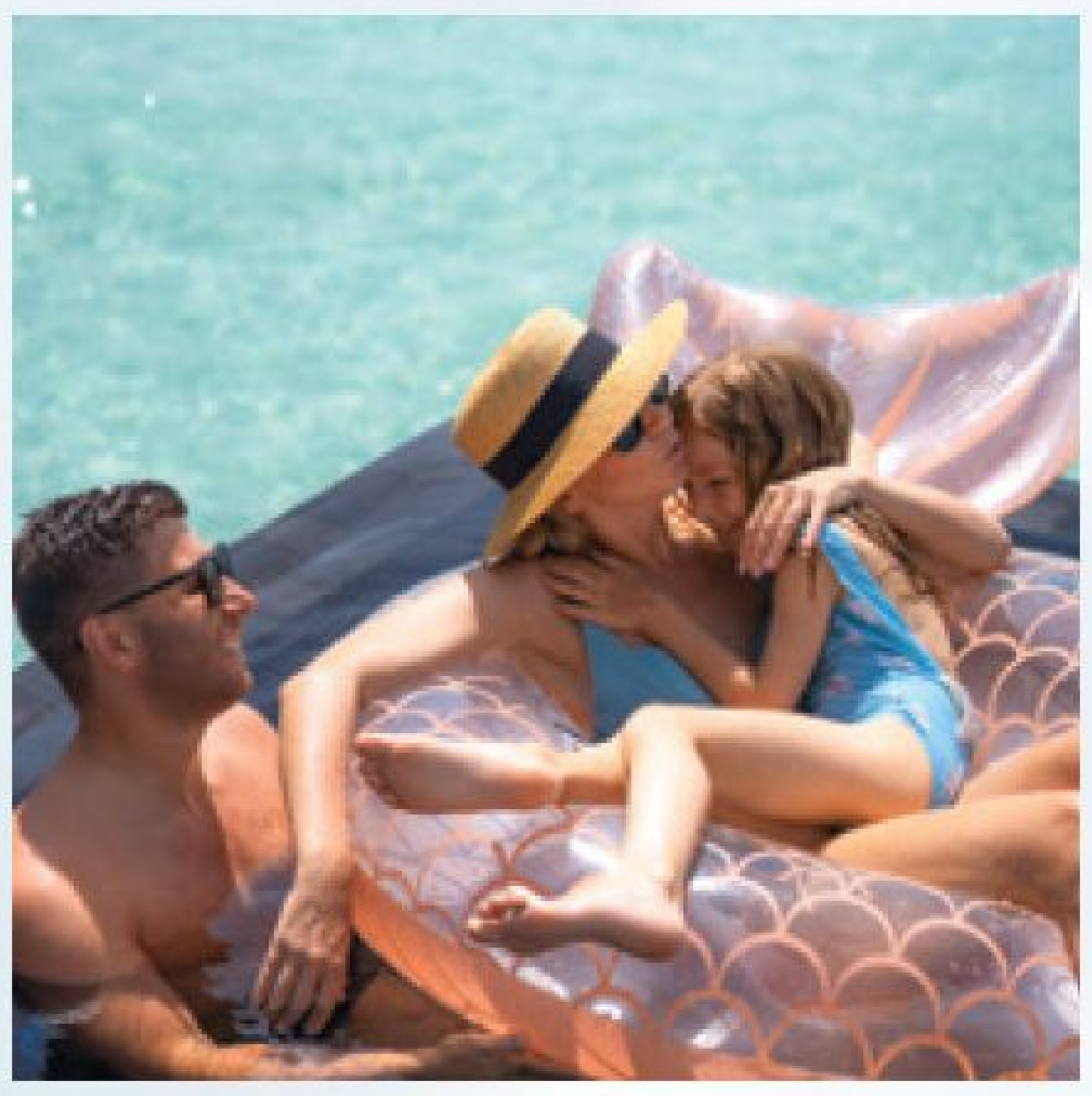

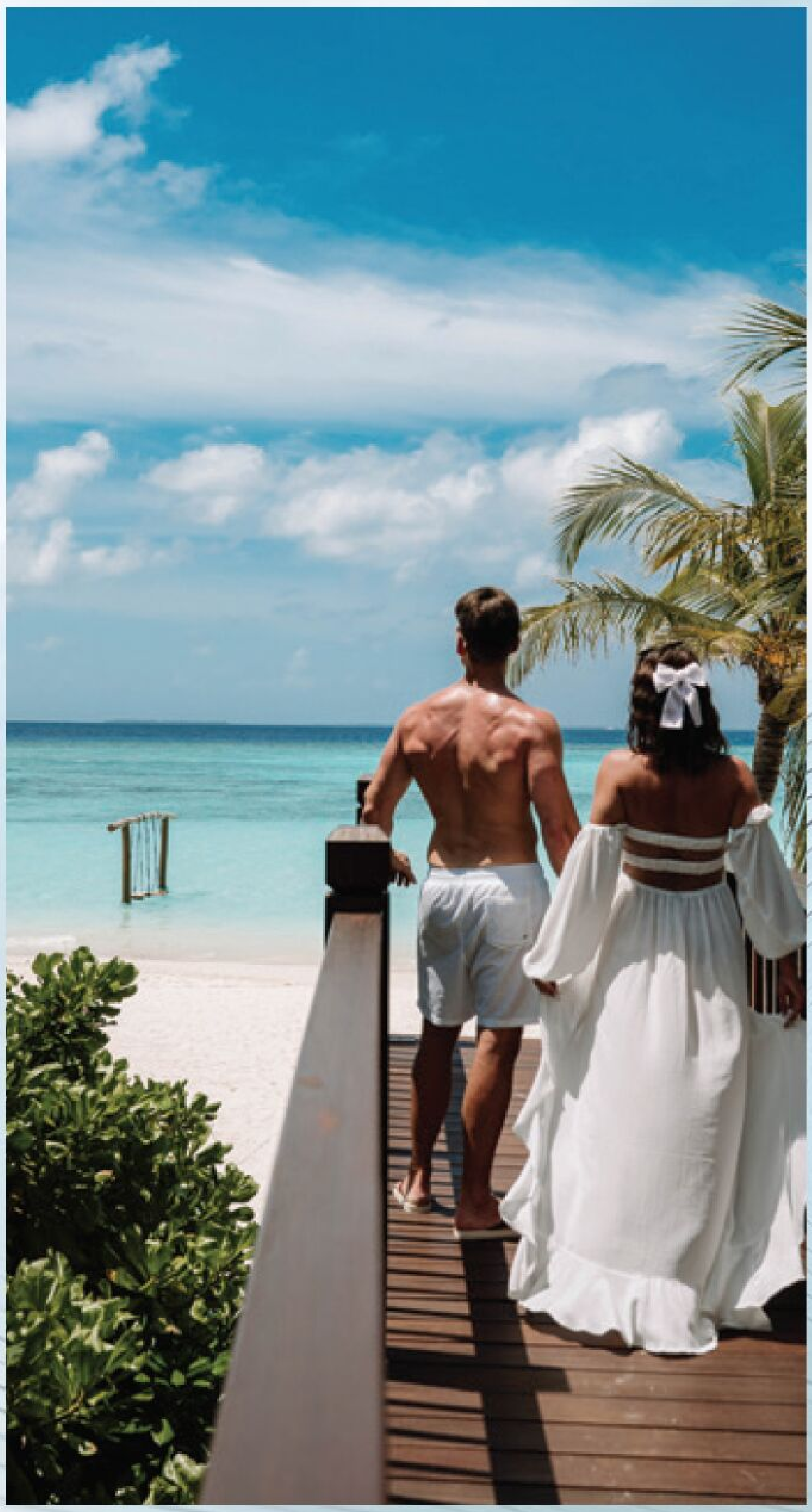

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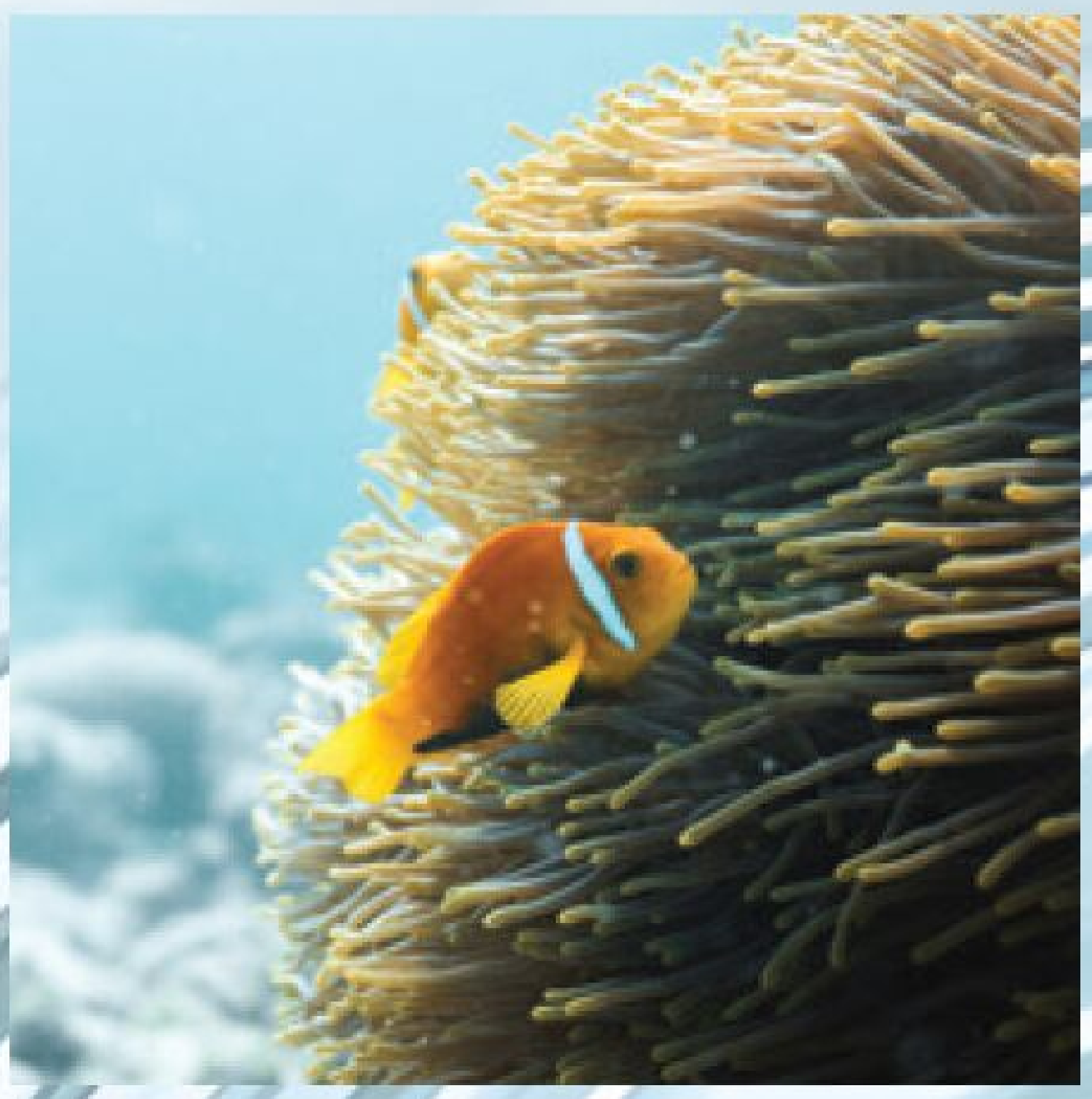

BUSINESS TRAVELLER MIDDLE EAST

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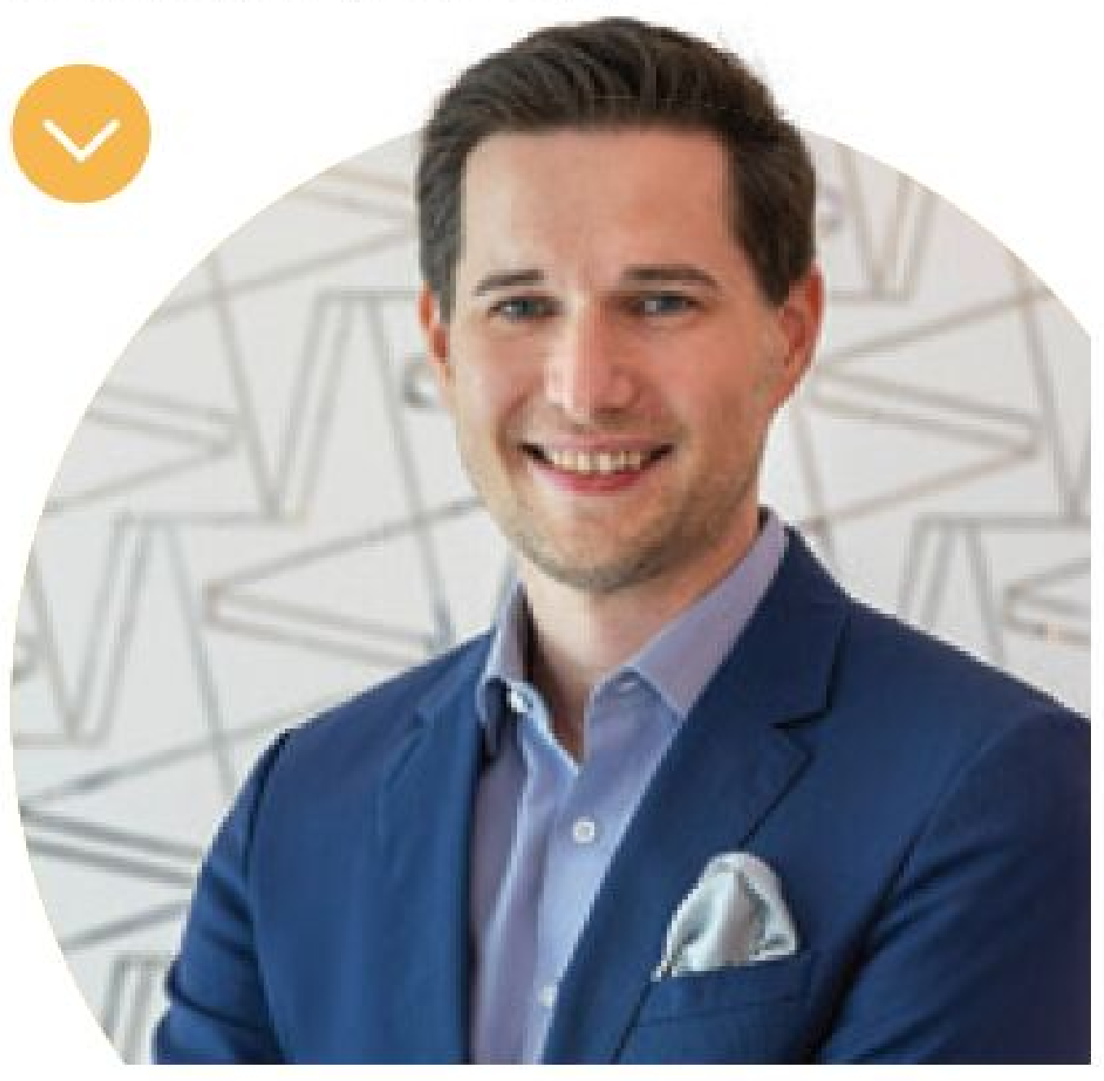

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Editor's Letter

WHEN YOU THINK OF THE FUTURE, do your feelings lean towards hope or despair? For many of us, I think it's a combination of the two. Consider the words of wisdom (and warning) from Mo Gawdat, former chief business officer for Google X. Gawdat made waves in a recent episode of Steven Bartlett's 'Diary of a CEO' podcast, when he said the next 15 years may be hellish, before we can reach a more blissful existence. His reasoning was that the mainstream introduction of AI will lead to widespread job displacement, and chaos through its economic and social impact. Yet once the dust has settled, he claimed, the world left behind could be a veritable utopia. The key to this outcome? To handle the shift responsibly, wherein governments, individuals, businesses, and society as a whole prepare proactively, to make the transition less challenging. Indeed, through history, major disruptive shifts – the kind that didn't just create progress so much as leapfrog us into the future, from the invention of the wheel and the airplane to the creation of the telephone and the world wide web – have taught us that the advancement of technology, in the truest form of its definition, comes hand in hand with the cost of change. And we all know growth is rarely easy.

While the pros and cons of AI and other future-forward technologies are still under debate, whether we like it or not, they're already out there – and for every scary story we read, there are also some inspiring ones. Engineers in Finland have discovered a way to turn sand into a battery. Scientists in Hong Kong are developing an e-skin that may make it possible to hug someone via the internet, felt in a tactile way, in real time. Researchers in Japan are working on scanners that can record our dreams. Doctors can use transcontinental remote robotic operations to perform life-saving "tele-surgery" on patients overseas. The Middle East's smart cities could institute a renaissance in the way we live. Ideas that once sounded like science fiction are increasingly becoming a reality, and like the TV show *Black Mirror* suggests, it's not the tech itself that should be cause for alarm, it's how we choose to use it. If we approach it with ethical and social consequences in mind, for good rather than nefarious purposes, it can lead to beautiful things. It is simply imperative that these technologies are developed and implemented with a sense of responsibility great enough to match their prospective impact.

In the travel, tourism, and hospitality industries, future technologies have thrilling potential. If used right, they could help more of us see more of the world, more safely, more affordably, and more easily. And for all of the fears of a world that feels "less human" somehow, how could one that allows more people to be enriched by the transformative power of travel – and its unique ability to broaden our perspectives, deepen our growth, and bring more of us together – be a bad thing? From visionary new organisations like Tourise (p.38), tech-forward hotels (p.30), clever gadgets (p.24) and innovative ideas (p.40) to the next-gen dining giving us food for thought (p.46 & p.53), this month we take a peek into the future that's already on our doorsteps. Enjoy the issue!

Yi-Hwa Hanna

Yi-Hwa Hanna
Editor

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HOT TICKET

A Skyline Redefined

Ciel Dubai Marina is set to open in the UAE this November as the world's tallest hotel

WORDS **YI-HWA HANNA**

THE RECORD-BREAKING landmark - part of the Vignette Collection by IHG - will scrape the sky at 377 metres high, spanning 82 floors. As well as being the world's tallest hotel, it's also set to feature the world's highest infinity pool on its 76th floor. Designed by award-winning architects Norr, it will feature 1,004 guestrooms and suites with panoramic views of Palm Jumeirah, the Arabian Gulf, and the city skyline, - plus eight dining venues, including Dubai's first Tattu Restaurant, and a Sky Pool and Sky Lounge, spread across three levels. Other amenities include a luxury spa on the 61st floor, a 24/7 gym, dedicated kids' facilities, and access to Soluna Beach Club on Palm Jumeirah, plus flexible meeting spaces, and an Executive Lounge titled "Nest".

→

The sound of a city, brought to life

ATLANTIS THE ROYAL, in collaboration with the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), unveiled a new centrepiece of its renowned Skyblaze Fountain Show on 12 September: a new display with a composition by Academy Award-winning composer Hans Zimmer. The 4.5-minute score is Zimmer's first official soundtrack for a destination. The song, named "Diamond in the Desert", was inspired by his immersive journey through Dubai, and aimed to capture the city's ambition, diversity, and bold spirit. Set to choreographed fire, water, and light, the composition is designed to transform the nightly Skyblaze Fountain Show into a cinematic tribute to Dubai's story, viewable from multiple dining venues across the resort. With over 200 film and television credits, multiple major awards, and some of the most iconic film music in history to his name, including compositions for *Gladiator*, *Inception*, and *Dune*, Zimmer is one of the most influential composers of his generation. His new Dubai-themed project represents the culmination of a three-year creative journey.

DID YOU KNOW?
Earlier this year, Qatar Airways partnered with Zimmer for an exclusive score: a signature sound for the airline played onboard as well as released on major streaming platforms

TOP: Atlantis The Royal's Skyblaze Fountain show

INSET: Composer Hans Zimmer

The St. Regis goes to Türkiye

The St. Regis Karya Cove Resort, Bodrum will be Marriott's 100th hotel in the country

MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL has announced the signing of an agreement with Kuzu Group to bring the iconic St. Regis brand to Bodrum's Kazıklı Cove. Anticipated to open in 2030, The St. Regis Karya Cove Resort, Bodrum and The Residences at The St. Regis Karya Cove Resort, Bodrum will introduce the brand's storied heritage, signature butler service, and bespoke luxury to Türkiye's stunning Aegean coast.

Set across a 280,000 sqm site, the beachfront development will comprise 138 guest rooms with multiple dining venues, indoor as well as outdoor pools, a fitness centre, kids club, spa, and versatile event spaces. The property will also have 221 branded residences ranging from one- to five-bedroom apartments and villas, with exclusive amenities including a lounge, co-working areas, a library, an exhibition kitchen, private fitness studios, and a swimming pool.

The project is a major milestone for Marriott in Türkiye, with The St. Regis Karya Cove Resort, Bodrum representing Marriott's 100th hotel across its operating and pipeline portfolio in the country. It also marks the second collaboration between Marriott International, Kuzu Group, and Servotel, following the successful opening of JW Marriott Hotel Istanbul Marmara Sea in 2022. Today, Marriott operates more than 60 properties in Türkiye, including six branded residences, with over 9,000 rooms spanning 21 distinct brands.

"Bodrum, with its azure waters, rich heritage, and contemporary allure, continues to attract travellers from around the world seeking refined leisure experiences," said. Jerome Briet, chief development officer, Europe, Middle East & Africa, Marriott International.

Özen Kuzu, president of Kuzu Group, said: "This project reflects our commitment to elevating luxury hospitality in the region. We look forward to contributing to Bodrum's growing reputation as a premier leisure destination.

The St. Regis Karya Cove

Anticipated to open in 2030, The St. Regis Karya Cove Resort, Bodrum will have 138 guest rooms

IMAGES SUPPLIED

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

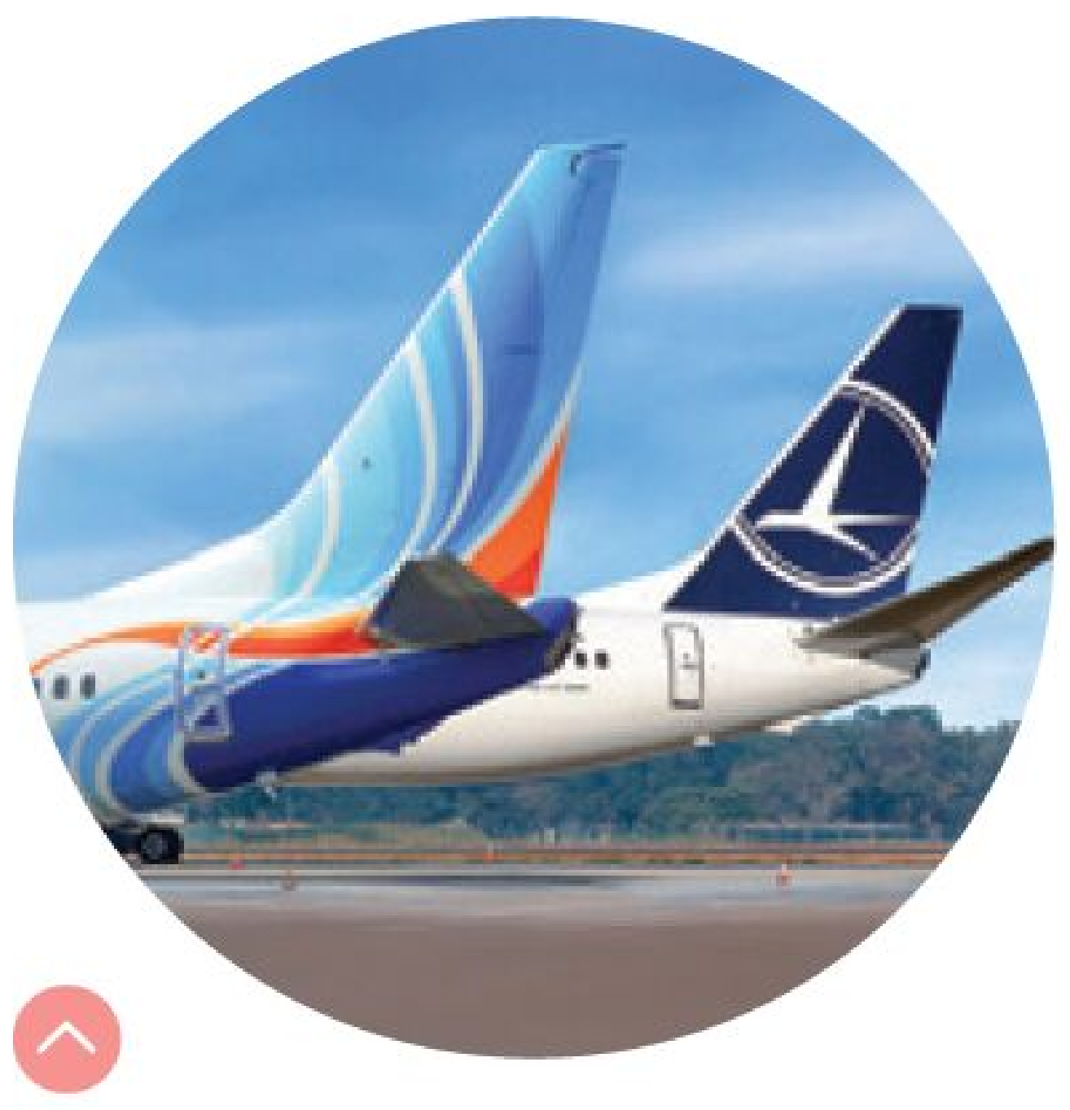
Hear, hear, for accessibility wins!

DUBAI AIRPORTS has installed more than 520 Hearing Loops across Dubai International (DXB), marking the world's largest deployment of the technology at an airport. The system, which supports travellers with hearing aids or cochlear implants, is now available at key customer touchpoints including check-in counters, immigration, boarding gates and information desks across all three DXB terminals. By activating the 'T' (telecoil) setting on their device, users can connect automatically without the need for pairing or extra equipment. The rollout was delivered in line with Dubai's Universal Design Code and supported by dedicated staff training. With over 1.5 billion people worldwide living with some degree of hearing loss, the World Health Organisation expects that number to rise to 2.5 billion by 2050 – making accessible communication systems a growing necessity for global transport hubs.

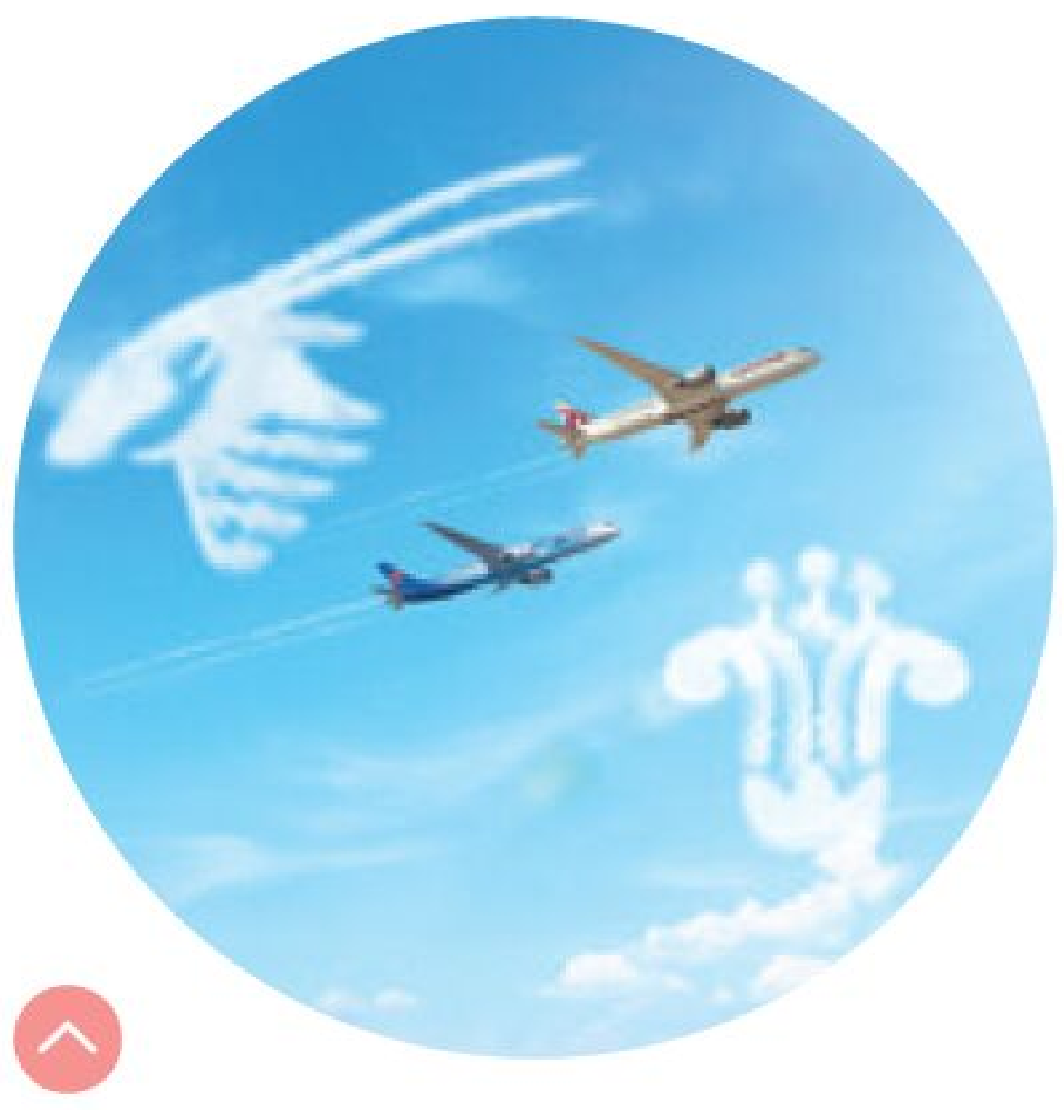
A new home for roving workers

ROVE HOTELS and IRTH Group have launched HQ by Rove: the Middle East's first standalone hospitality-branded office development. The flagship project, set in Dubai's Business Bay overlooking Marasi Bay Marina, introduces a new model of Grade-A commercial space designed with a lifestyle-first approach. The concept extends Rove's lifestyle ecosystem beyond hotels and residences, offering tenants access to Rove's network of work spaces plus exclusive benefits across its portfolio. HQ by Rove combines modular and loft-style private offices with shared communal areas, wellness facilities, and hotel-inspired amenities. It features flexible workspaces, double-height communal zones, dedicated content creation spaces, and unique elements such as a vertical café, a food hall, rooftop wellness pods, and landscaped treehouse cabins with skyline views.

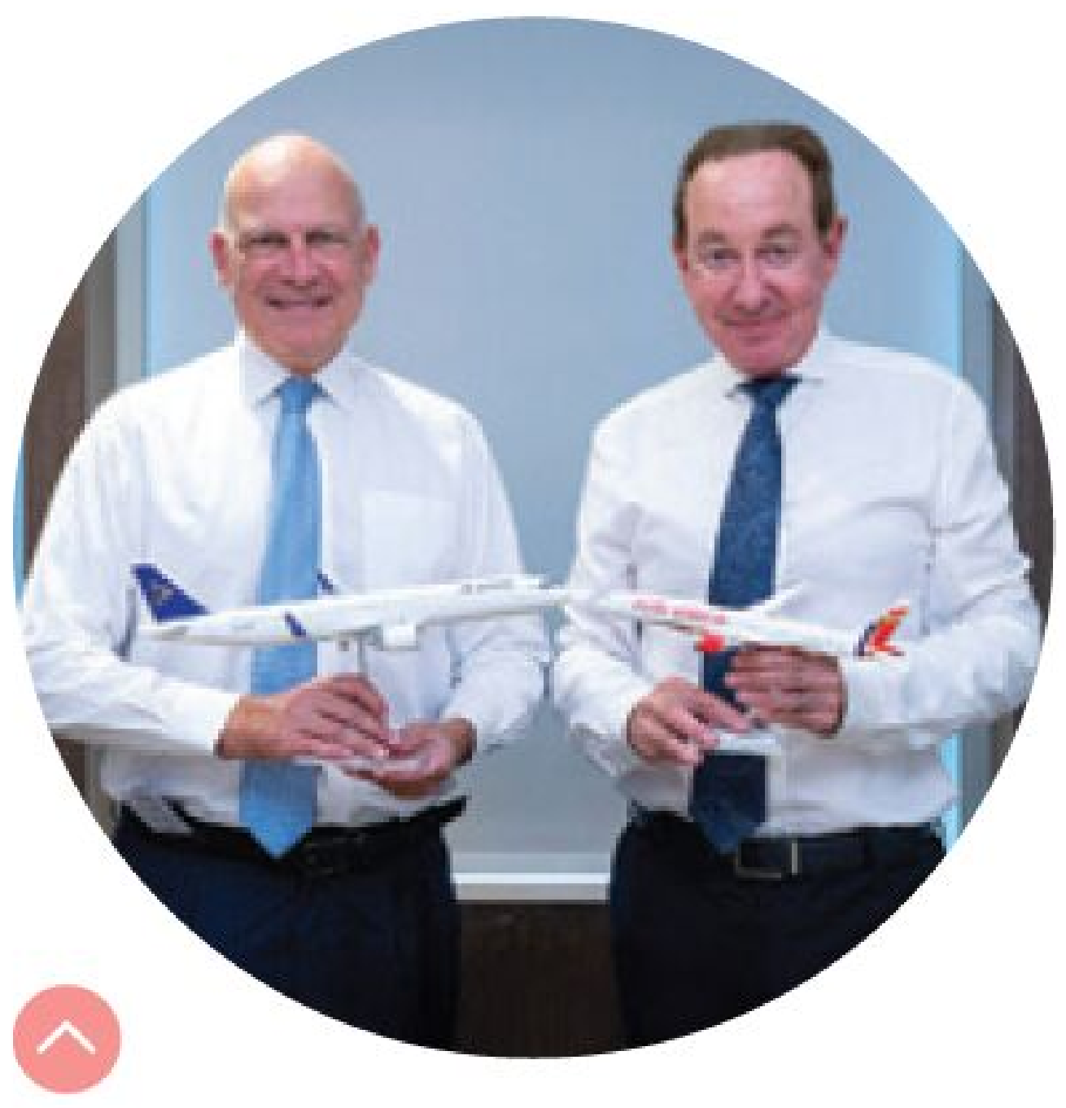
ROUTE ROUND-UP



flydubai has begun an interline partnership with **TAROM**, the flagship carrier of Romania, giving flydubai passengers easier access to 15 destinations within TAROM's network, travelling via Bucharest International Airport (OTP). The seamless flight ticket can be booked through flydubai's website and app, as well as through a number of travel agents. flydubai first launched flights to Bucharest in 2012, and now offers two flights a day from DXB.



Qatar Airways will be majorly expanding its codeshare partnership with **China Southern Airlines**, and increasing flights. Starting 16 October, Qatar Airways will codeshare on China Southern's three weekly nonstop flights between Beijing Daxing and Doha. China Southern will be adding its "CZ" code on Qatar Airways-operated flights to 15 destinations across Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, including Amman, Athens, Barcelona, Cairo, and more.



Air Astana and **Air India** have begun a codeshare agreement, expanding connectivity between Kazakhstan and India on key routes, including services between Almaty-Delhi and Almaty-Mumbai. As part of the agreement, Air India will be placing its "AI" designator code on these flights. Customers will have easier access and greater convenience when travelling between the two countries. This move builds on an interline partnership established earlier this year.

flyadeal - Saudi Arabia's popular low-cost carrier - has expanded its footprint in Pakistan with the launch of nonstop flights from Riyadh to Islamabad, Peshawar, and Sialkot. The new services, which began at the end of August, build on the airline's entry into the Pakistani market earlier this year with flights to Karachi. The expansion doubles flyadeal's services to Pakistan, with 13 weekly flights now connecting the kingdom and South Asia.

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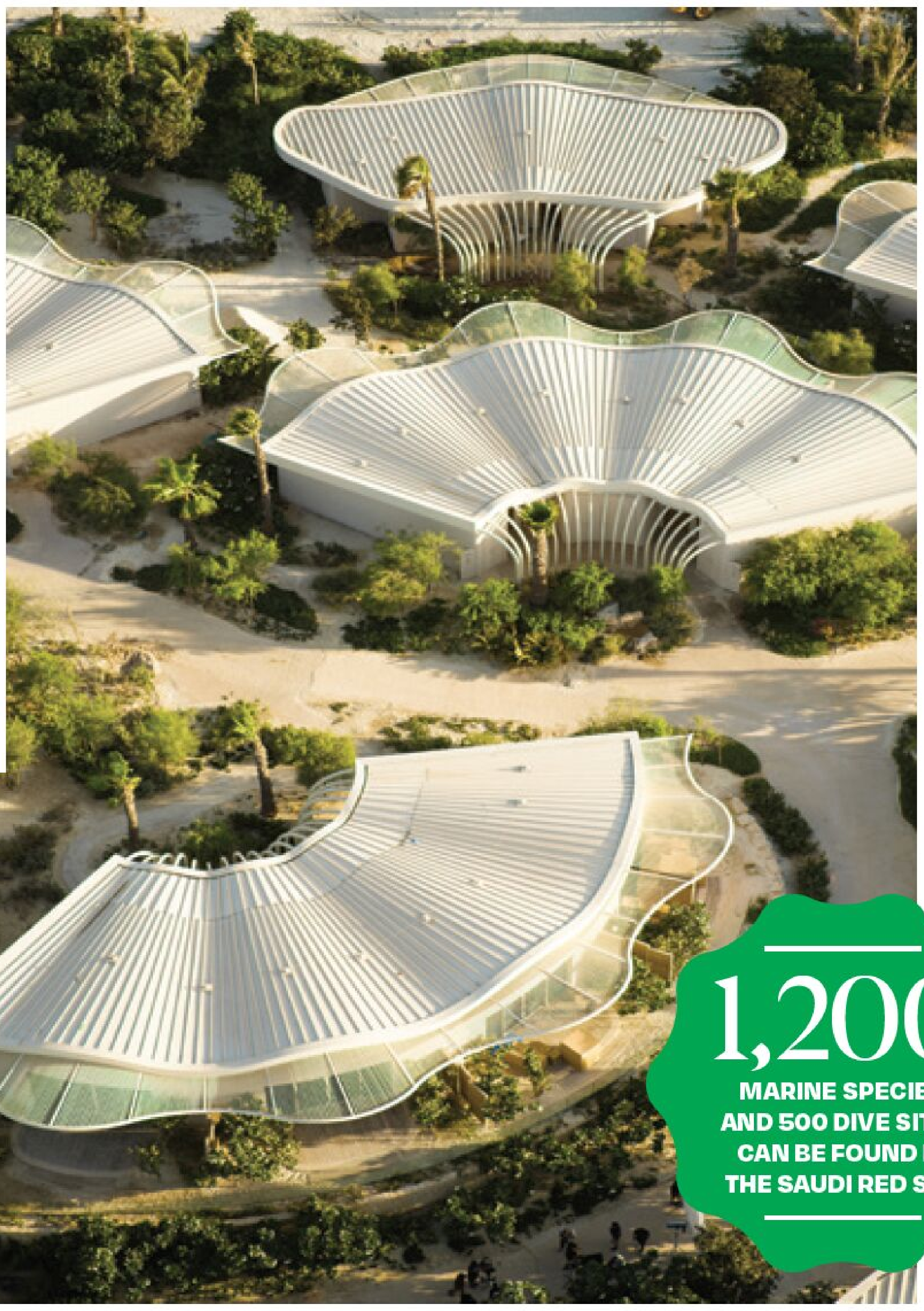

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MARINE SPECIES AND 500 DIVE SITES CAN BE FOUND IN THE SAUDI RED SEA

Shura Island makes a sustainable splash

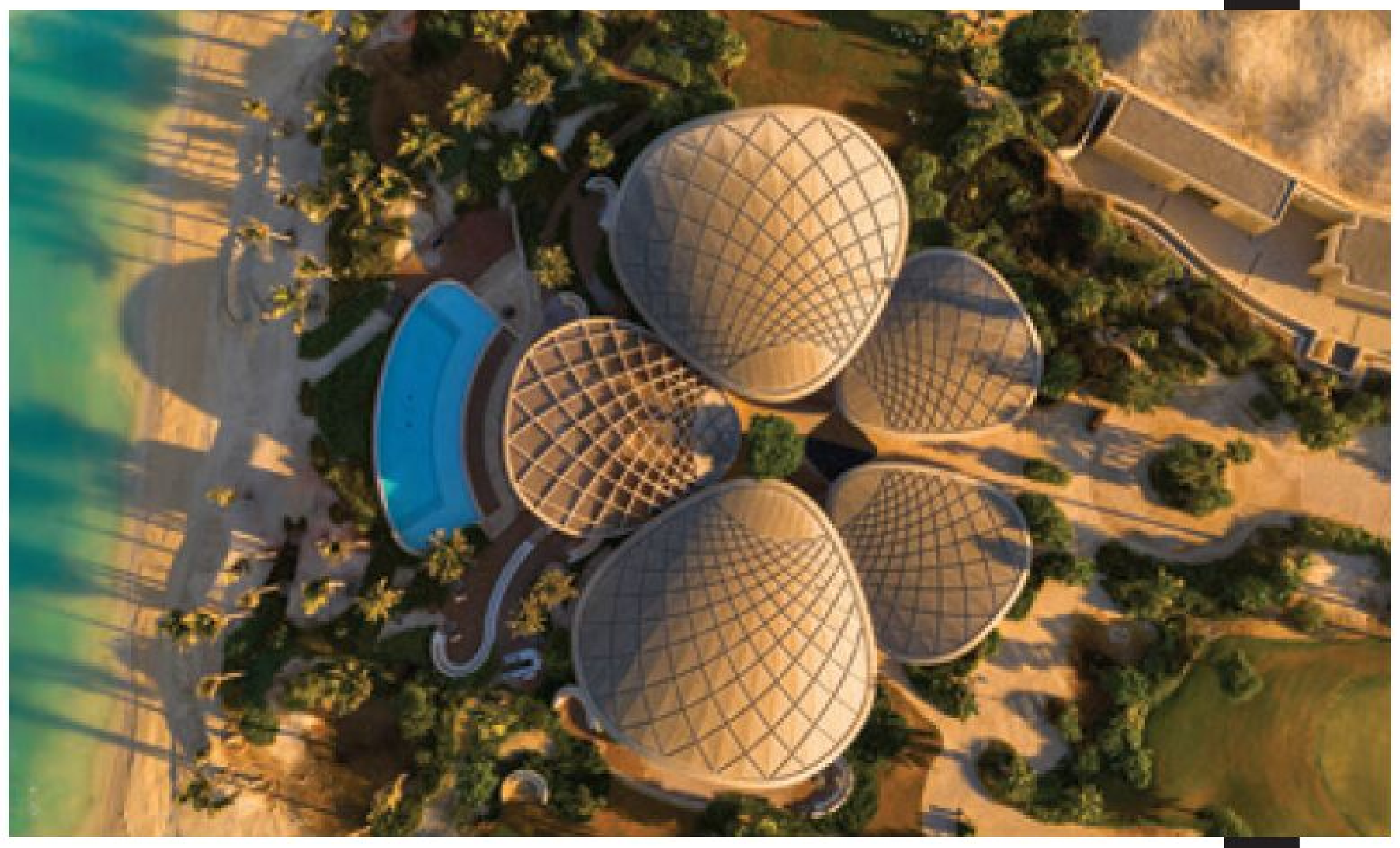
The gleaming new centrepiece of Saudi Arabia's Red Sea destination is now officially open

THE RED SEA GLOBAL (RSG)-LED Shura Island, the centrepiece of Saudi Arabia's Red Sea destination, began welcoming its first guests in September, marking a major milestone in realising Vision 2030's tourism ambitions. The initial phase includes the opening of SLS Red Sea, EDITION Red Sea and InterContinental Red Sea Resort, alongside the debut of Shura Links – Saudi Arabia's first island golf course. Designed by Foster + Partners under the 'Coral Bloom' concept, the naturally dolphin-shaped island will ultimately host 11 resorts by the time of its completion, with Faena, Four Seasons, Jumeirah, and Rosewood among those set to follow. Guests will arrive via marina or electric vehicle across the 3.3km Shura crossing, which includes Saudi Arabia's longest internal bridge, or directly through Red Sea International Airport, now connected to regional and international routes including a new Qatar Airways service.

Each of the opening-phase resorts brings a distinct identity: SLS Red Sea with bold design and cultural programming; EDITION Red Sea offering modern luxury across 240 rooms and suites; and InterContinental Red Sea Resort, a five-star escape inspired by surrounding coral reefs. Shura Links adds a championship 18-hole golf course, combining coastal views with sustainable water management practices.

As well as resorts, Shura will feature exclusive homes available for private ownership, with first handovers due by the end of 2025. The entire island, like the wider Red Sea destination, will run on 100% renewable energy, and is a key example of Saudi Arabia and Red Sea Global's pioneering work in demonstrating the possibilities of regenerative tourism.

"As the heart of The Red Sea, Shura Island represents everything Red Sea Global stands for: bold ambition, deep respect for nature, and a commitment to redefining tourism in Saudi Arabia and beyond," said John Pagano, group CEO of Red Sea Global.



Straight-Up Fresh

UNS VERTICAL FARMS, a division of Speedex Group, now offers guided farm tours at its facility in Al Quoz 3 - one of the UAE's first commercial vertical farms. The one-hour tours are open to families, students, culinary professionals, and environmentally-conscious visitors keen to learn how local, high-quality produce is grown sustainably in Dubai. Running from Mondays to Saturdays (excluding holidays) from 10am to 4pm, they take guests through climate-controlled chambers with eight levels of farming where microgreens, edible flowers, herbs, and leafy greens are grown using hydroponic, soil-free methods that significantly reduce water usage and environmental impact. It includes educational sessions on plant life-cycles, sustainable farming, and the benefits of local sustainable agriculture, plus tastings, at AED 70 pp.

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Scale & Service

A leading hotel venue for everything from business meetings to global conferences and culture festivals, InterContinental Dubai Festival City is renowned for its ability to host events at scale, while providing service with precision. **Thomas Schmelter - Area General Manager, IHG Hotels at Dubai Festival City** tells us more

What makes this property stand out in Dubai's highly competitive hospitality landscape?
Our cluster of four IHG hotels incorporating three brands – InterContinental, Crowne Plaza, and Holiday Inn & Suites – deliver a unique blend of global sophistication and authentic local experiences. With direct mall access, waterfront views of Dubai Creek, award-winning dining, and the iconic IMAGINE show, we offer more than stays; we create memorable moments. Coupled with innovation, sustainability, and strong synergies with various Al-Futtaim Group verticals, we stand as a premier destination redefining hospitality excellence in Dubai and the GCC.

The property's Events Centre recently underwent a refurbishment. Tell us more!
The Event Centre refurbishment introduced two stunningly redesigned ballrooms by David T'Kint, complemented by elegant pre-function spaces with Dubai Creek and Burj Khalifa views. Technology enhancements include one of the region's largest LED screen and a powerful 16.5k lumen projector, creating world-class staging for any occasion. These upgrades ensure versatility, whether for corporate summits, galas, or weddings, while reinforcing InterContinental's reputation for hosting impactful, premium events.

What are some of the new features?
Advanced audiovisual technology, expansive natural daylight meeting rooms, and seamless digital signage. The highlight is the region's largest LED screen, offering immersive visual possibilities. Flexible layouts, high-speed wifi, and sustainable setups such as plastic-free water service and reusable banquet materials; enhance both functionality and environmental responsibility. Together, these innovations elevate delegate engagement while providing organisers with convenience, flexibility, and peace of mind.

IMAGE SUPPLIED

Business travellers play a vital role in the hospitality industry. Why are they so significant, and how do you cater to them?
Business travellers drive Dubai's position as a global hub. We cater to them with the Club InterContinental lounge, versatile meeting spaces, award-winning F&B, and seamless connectivity to business districts. We prioritise innovation and inclusivity, ensuring personalised, tech-enhanced experiences. With complimentary airport transfers, direct mall access, and wellness offerings, we balance productivity with relaxation, meeting the evolving expectations of today's blended business and leisure traveller.

The Events Centre is one of the largest in the city. How does its scale and flexibility set you apart from other properties?
Spanning 4,700 sqm, it offers 19 flexible meeting rooms and two enhanced ballrooms, while the Festival Arena provides 7,200 sqm of pillarless space for up to 9,000 guests. This scale allows us to host everything from intimate board meetings to global conventions. The combination of vast capacity, modular design, and outdoor waterfront venues makes us uniquely equipped to deliver truly customised, memorable events.

Large-scale events can place unique demands on a hotel. How do you ensure operational excellence when the property is packed with event guests?
It comes from blending technology with the human touch. AI-driven scheduling and guest flow tools enhance efficiency, while our service culture, rooted in Inspire Incredible, ensures empathy and personal care. Guest loyalty is strengthened as every interaction; from check-in to concierge is delivered with precision and warmth. This dual approach allows us to manage volume while ensuring memorable guest journeys.

How do you support non-event guests when there's something on at the hotel?
Enhanced staffing ensures personal attention, so every guest feels valued and immersed in a curated lifestyle.

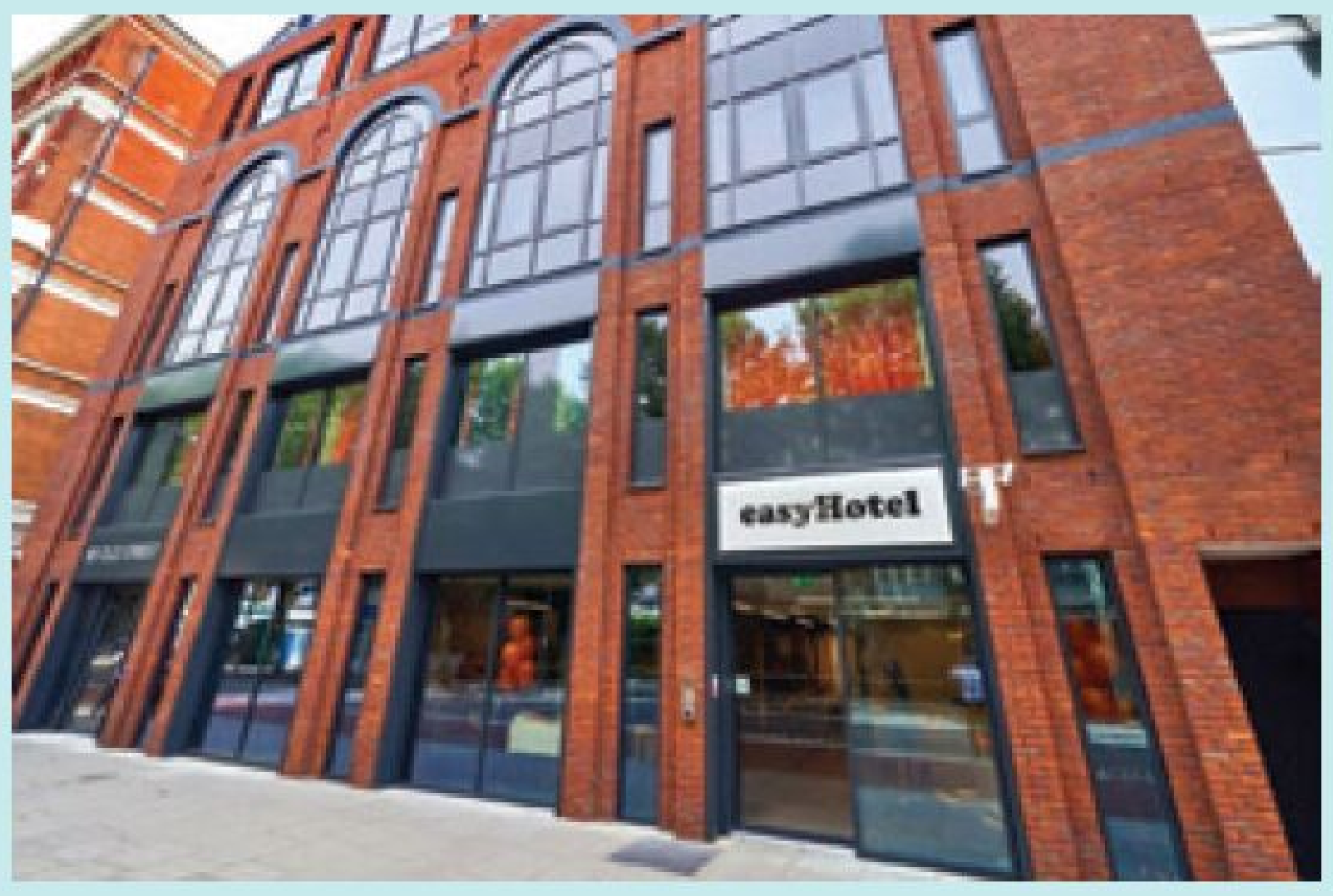
How do your teams work together to deliver seamless service during peak periods?
Collaboration is anchored in our leadership pillars. Pre-event briefings align cross-departmental priorities, while technology platforms ensure real-time coordination. From culinary innovation to concierge support, every department works in sync, sharing accountability for guest satisfaction. This cohesion empowers our teams to deliver consistent, world-class service, even during the most demanding event schedules.

InterContinental Dubai Festival City is part of a larger interconnected property with other IHG hotels. What advantage does this model offer, and how does this influence the way you manage operations?
Few destinations offer four global brands in one location. Our interconnected model offers a unified approach; pooling resources across InterContinental, Crowne Plaza, Holiday Inn & Suites, and InterContinental Residence Suites. This allows for seamless overflow management, shared meeting and dining venues, and centralised event planning. Organisers enjoy unmatched flexibility; whether booking luxury suites, extended-stay apartments, or value-driven rooms all supported by award-winning facilities. The cluster's scale, direct access to Dubai Festival City mall, and shared infrastructure ensure convenience and efficiency.

What's in the pipeline?
Dubai's growth as a global events hub aligns with our vision, and our refurbished Event Centre and Festival Arena position us to host high-profile gatherings. Our future plans include expanded AI integration for personalised guest journeys and innovative dining concepts to strengthen our position as a lifestyle destination. With sustainability at the core, we aim to set new benchmarks in impactful, future-ready hospitality.

GET THE SCOOP

The latest updates in the travel industry from across the world



1 EasyHotel introduces Apple Wallet-compatible room keys

(Above) The new key cards have been launched at easyHotel London City Shoreditch and easyHotel Paris Aubervilliers. At these properties, guests can now unlock their room using their personal device – either an iPhone or Apple watch – with a digital key card downloaded into their Apple Wallet, after booking with easyHotel. The card will only be activated after check-in and until check-out. For room and any check-out changes, the key can be updated remotely.

2 Virgin Atlantic adds dementia-friendly films to IFE

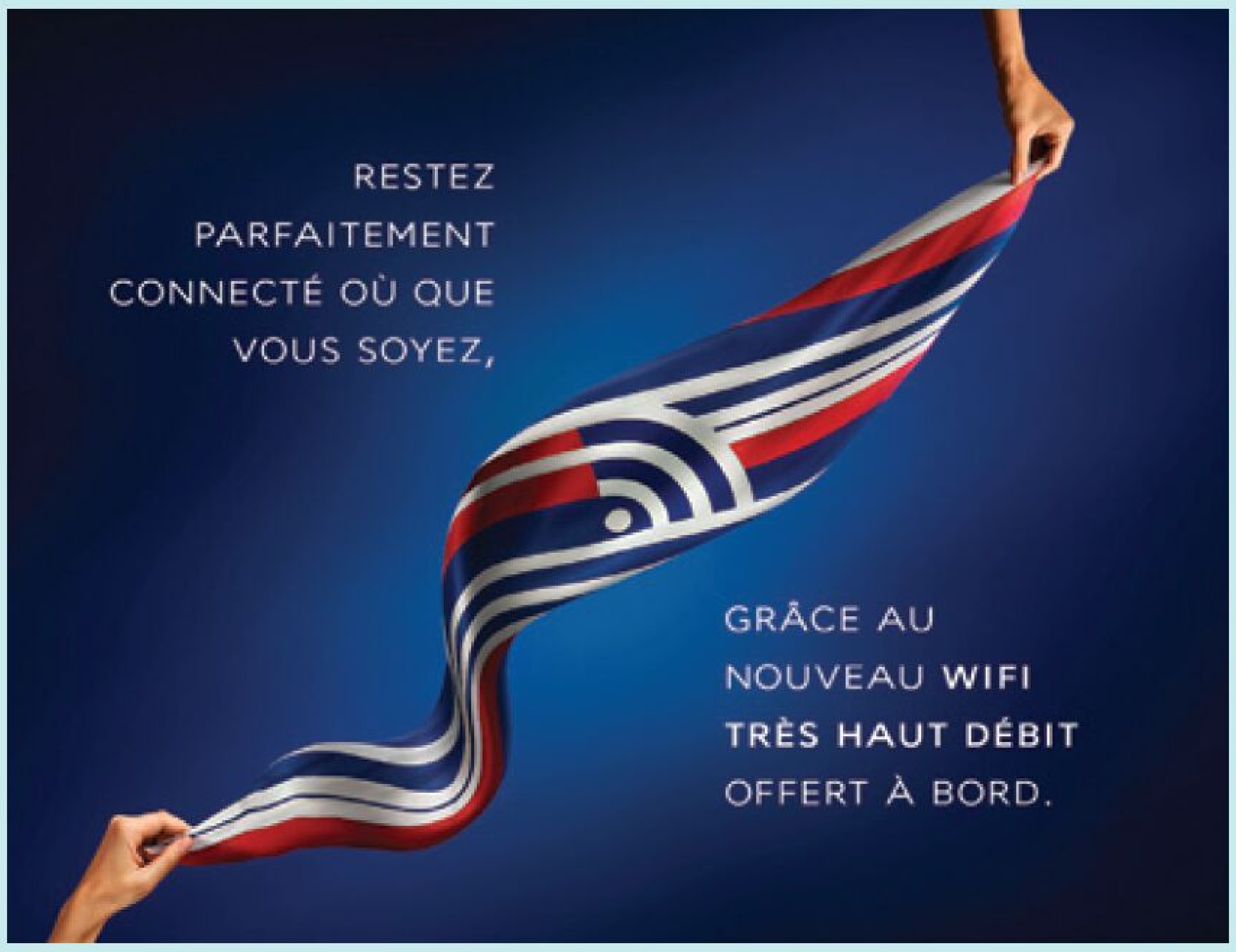
(Right) Following a successful launch last summer, Virgin Atlantic has once again partnered with the Women Over 50 Film Festival (WOFFF) to bring a new curated collection of dementia-friendly short films to its inflight entertainment system. These nine additions cater to travellers with dementia and their companions through gentle soundtracks, simple storylines, calming moments and scenes that might spark memories.

3 TAP Air Portugal adds Bluetooth technology to its long-haul economy class cabins

(Left) The tech was already available in business class on long haul routes, and has now been introduced to economy cabins on the carriers' 19 Airbus A330-900neo aircraft and 13 Airbus A321-200LR too – though not on the carrier's three Airbus A330-200 aircraft. The technology allows passengers to pair their own personal Bluetooth-enabled headphones to their IFE screen, rather than rely on the airline's disposable handouts.

4 Air France begins rollout of free Starlink wifi

(Below) The carrier has begun rolling out complimentary, high-speed wifi across its fleet using Starlink technology, after first announcing plans to introduce SpaceX's Starlink last year. The service is free for passengers in all cabins, allowing them to stream films and TV shows, enjoy online games and connect multiple devices at once. So far, Air France has successfully equipped two Embraer 190 and two Airbus A220 aircraft, with one Airbus A350 set to receive the technology later this week. By the end of the year, the carrier plans to have 30% of its fleet equipped with the technology, and the entire fleet by the end of 2026.



IMAGES SUPPLIED

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA,
HANNAH BRANDLER,
ALICE HENDERSON

5 The Ritz-Carlton to make brand debut in Fiji

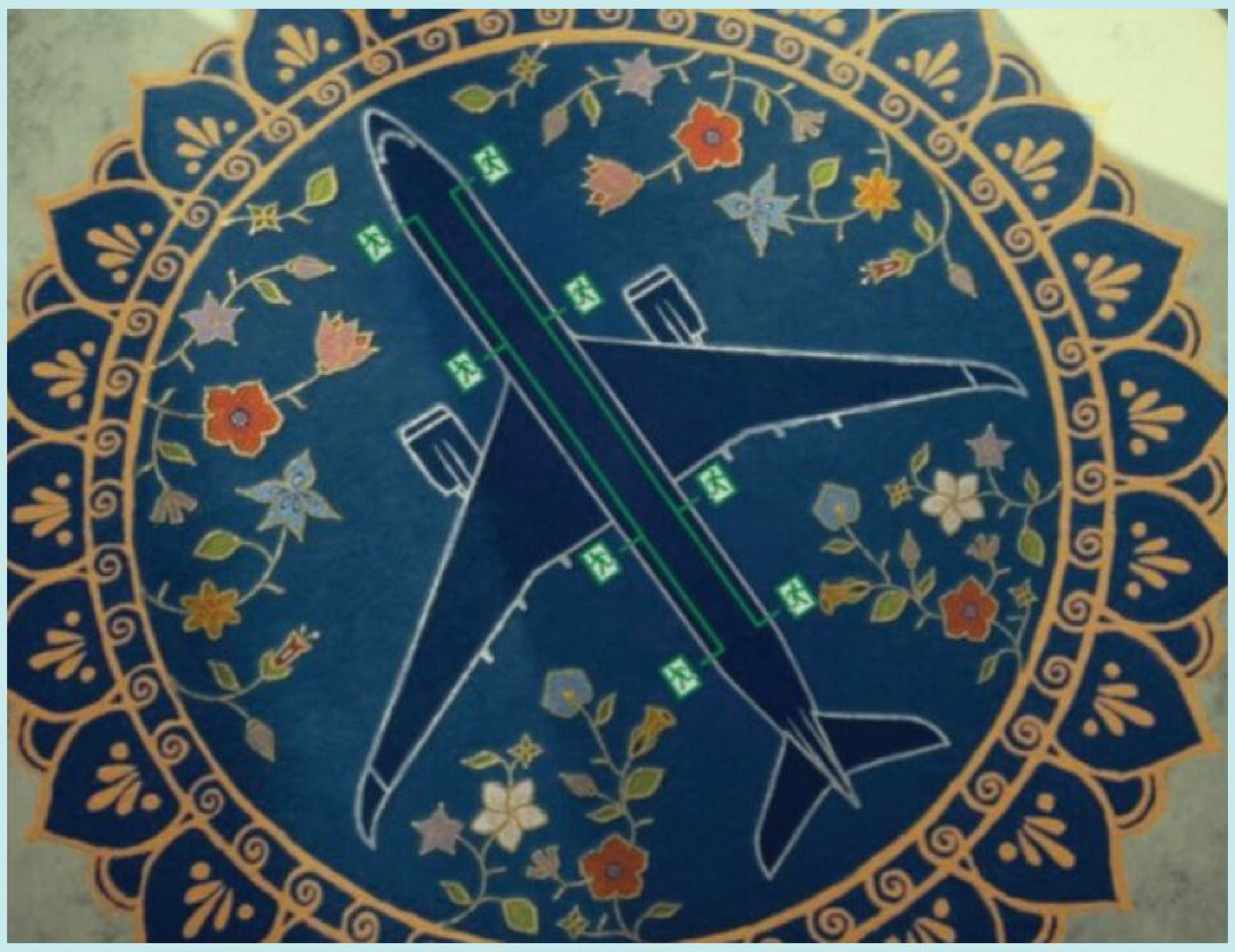
(Right) Marriott International has signed an agreement with Luxurious Resort (Fiji) to open The Ritz-Carlton Fiji, Namuka Bay, marking the brand's debut in Fiji. Expected to open in 2030, the 249-key new-build luxury resort will be a milestone opening for Marriott. The Ritz-Carlton Fiji, Namuka Bay will be situated in the heart of Fiji's Coral Coast on a 28-hectare beachfront site, just over an hour's drive from Nadi International Airport (NAN). Designed to reflect Fijian culture and heritage, most guest rooms will feature ocean views, while villas will offer private pools. Plans also include for the resort to offer seven diverse culinary experiences.

6 JetBlue becomes first airline to partner with Amazon's Project Kuiper for inflight wifi

(Above) The tech will be installed on selected aircraft from 2027, which the airline says will bring "even faster and more reliable connectivity" to its Fly-Fi onboard wifi service. Project Kuiper is in the process of deploying more than 3,200 satellites into low Earth orbit, with the aim of competing with Space X's Starlink. JetBlue introduced free inflight wifi in 2013, and the carrier said the Project Kuiper technology would be installed "on aircraft currently flying JetBlue's original Fly-Fi technology, enhancing the customer experience with its next-gen satellite connectivity with faster speeds and lower latency". It added that "While aircraft outfitted with Project Kuiper will rely on the new low Earth orbit system, JetBlue is positioned to explore a multi-orbit solution in the future."

7 Singapore Airlines unveils its new inflight safety video

(Below) The video, produced in partnership with the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), combines real-life footage and watercolour-style visuals, with the SIA cabin crew detailing safety procedures while visiting famous landmarks across the city-state. It also features members of local communities to demonstrate a different aspect of the briefing, with each group located in a different neighbourhood. These include a lion dance troupe in Jurong Lake Gardens, hotel guests and an aqua aerobics group at Village Hotel Sentosa, Kolam artists, and practitioners of martial arts Silat, at Tanjong Beach in Sentosa. Singapore's popular cuisine is also highlighted throughout the film, featuring a family at a high-rise public housing estate, travellers at the vibrant Lau Pa Sat hawker centre, and the airline's iconic cabin crew.



8 Mandarin Oriental to debut in South Korea in 2030

(Above) The new hotel is planned to be opened in Seoul's Central Business District, with 128 rooms and suites, and interiors by celebrated designer André Fu. Culinary venues will include a 21st floor restaurant with panoramic city views, plus two restaurants on the 20th floor – one with elevated international fare, and another showcasing Chinese cuisine. The same floor will house a high-end Korean chef's counter, with immersive and theatrical dining experiences. On the ground floor, guests can expect a bar, lounge and Mandarin Cake Shop; and various facilities for meetings and events, including private dining rooms, a grand ballroom, and function rooms with a private outdoor terrace. The hotel will also have a four-floor spa, a 25m pool, fitness centre, a golf academy, games room, and kids club.

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Expert opinions on the future of travel

The experiential imperative

Yi-Hwa Hanna chats with **Gerrit Schmitt**, general manager of Marriott Resort Palm Jumeirah, to learn how this popular destination keeps people returning time and time again

Why do you think experiential hospitality is so highly valued these days? Is it now essential?
Absolutely – it's no longer optional. Today's travellers, especially business travellers extending into leisure, want more than the basics. They expect a sense of place, an itinerary that feels curated, and experiences that are personalised. With Marriott Bonvoy, we're able to deliver on that expectation, giving our loyal guests enriching opportunities that go far beyond the room. For us, experiential hospitality is about anticipating needs – whether that's a wellness break between meetings, a rooftop dinner with partners, or a tailored excursion into the city. These details transform a stay from functional into memorable.

Anything you're extra proud of?
How our team turns everyday stays into memorable stories. Despite welcoming thousands of guests daily, our associates are empowered to personalise moments – whether it's creating a bespoke itinerary for a business traveller extending their stay into leisure, or surprising a family with a small but meaningful gesture. This generosity is reflected in our return rates. In just three years, over 25% of our guests have already stayed with us more than once – a testament to the fact that people not only enjoy their time here, they want to come back. For a property of this scale, that loyalty says a lot about the way our people connect with guests across different profiles.

With 10 F&B options at your property, distinctive dining is a large part of the appeal. How do you stand out in a crowded market, and with venues that keep people coming back?
One of the ways we stand out is through the diversity of our restaurants – each with a strong personality, yet complementary to the whole. Smoki Moto, Dubai's first licensed Korean steakhouse, has quickly become a hub for the Korean community and discerning locals. Cucina, our playful neighbourhood-style Italian trattoria, is where families and friends gather over handmade pasta and pizza. Above Eleven, an award-winning Peruvian-Japanese brand with roots in Bangkok, draws a younger, international crowd looking for elevated dining paired with DJ-led nightlife. We also see strong demand for hybrid venues that suit both business and leisure. Poolside dining, al fresco breakfasts, and flexible spaces mean our corporate guests can host partners in inspiring settings without leaving the resort. This variety not only captures different demographics, it encourages repeat visits, as there's always a new experience waiting.

In your premium suites and penthouses, there are private spa baths, private saunas, and expansive outdoor terraces. What inspired these additions?
We wanted to bring the essence of Dubai living into our suites. The first thing guests notice is the view – sweeping perspectives of the Arabian Gulf, JBR's high-rises, and yachts cruising past the Palm. The second is the sense of space.

You have an impressive events offering. Tell us more.
The key is equal parts people, place, and purpose. Our team works seamlessly across selling, planning, and operations, ensuring every touchpoint is managed with precision. Personalisation and creativity are central – we don't just host events; we co-create them with our clients. Our spaces set the stage beautifully: 2,200 sqm of versatile venues, all with natural daylight, plus inspiring outdoor options such as West Beach Terrace overlooking the Gulf and Palm Islands. Every room is designed to adapt – from board meetings to team-building, and gala dinners to alfresco receptions. Sustainability is another cornerstone. With our Green Meetings initiatives, we offer plant-based menus, filtered water in reusable glass bottles, carbon offset options, and even mangrove adoption programmes. It means every gathering here can have a positive impact – not just for our clients, but for the wider community.

> 'Today's travellers, especially business travellers extending into leisure, want more than the basics'

Any exciting upcoming plans you can share with us?
We'll be introducing a new room category featuring extended terrace space and stunning second-floor views – perfect for travellers who want a little more privacy. And for the first time, we'll also be welcoming furry friends. We're redeveloping our beach offering at Bal Harbour with a new kitchen, and an expanded menu. Cucina will be unveiling a surprise enhancement that we can't wait to share. We're also expanding our recreational facilities and enlarging some of our terraces to give guests more outdoor lifestyle options. **BT**

IMAGE SUPPLIED

Tradition in transit

A brand with a storied history, Samsonite recently celebrated its 115th anniversary. Yi-Hwa Hanna chats with **Subrata Dutta**, Samsonite's president of APAC and Middle East, to learn more about its evolution

Samsonite's anniversary marked the launch of its New Streamline line. Can you tell us about it?
The New Streamlite is a modern tribute to its iconic 1940s Streamlite luggage. The original was a bestseller known for its innovation and leather look finish using lithographed paper. The new line honours that heritage while embracing modern design and engineering. Limited to 2,025 numbered pieces, it blends timeless elegance with contemporary functionality: a nod to the past, built for today's traveller.

I've noticed a trend for vintage, classic luggage styles in the past year. Why do you think this is?
That's a great observation and it's absolutely true. I believe it's fuelled by a few key factors. Firstly, there's a growing appreciation for timeless design and craftsmanship, especially as consumers seek pieces with character and heritage. The secondhand and vintage markets are also booming globally, driven by sustainability, affordability, and a desire for unique fashion statements. Social media has played a big role in spotlighting vintage aesthetics, making retro-inspired designs like our New Streamlite both nostalgic and highly relevant.

Despite the desire for the retro aesthetic, it seems that customers are also still seeking modern functions and convenience in the product. What was Samsonite's approach in blending the two?
We wanted to ensure that the New Streamlite preserves the soul of the original 1940s design while being completely reengineered for the modern traveller. It combines classic elements like the framed exterior and heritage-inspired Resort Print interiors with modern innovations such as the Aero-Trac suspension wheels for smoother mobility, the TSA-approved one-touch locking system, and thoughtfully-designed interiors with satin lining and packing accessories. It's a carefully curated blend of heritage and modern utility.

> 'Social media has played a big role in highlighting vintage aesthetics'

How is your brand leveraging the use of Artificial Intelligence?
[We're using it] primarily to enhance customer experience and operational efficiency, from demand forecasting and inventory optimisation to AI-powered product recommendations and personalisation across our digital platforms. AI helps us stay responsive to consumer needs while streamlining backend processes.

RIGHT Subrata Dutta, president of APAC and Middle East, Samsonite

IMAGE **SUPPLIED**

What are some recent trends in the travel retail space – and what's next?
One of the biggest shifts has been toward experience-driven travel. Consumers are no longer just shopping at airports; they're looking for immersive, memorable moments. There's also a strong push for sustainability, with travellers favouring eco-friendly brands and packaging. Personalisation is another major trend, as AI helps curate travel experiences and product recommendations. Blended travel – mixing business with leisure – is also growing. Looking ahead, I expect deeper integration of tech from smart luggage to AR-enhanced retail spaces, and a continued emphasis on values-based conscious travel retail.

What's driving your approach towards younger or next-gen consumers?
Younger consumers expect more than just functionality – they seek purpose, personalisation, and digital-first experiences. For millennials, we focus on smart, durable travel solutions that balance quality with lifestyle appeal. Gen Z, on the other hand, values bold design, brand ethics, and sustainability. They respond to storytelling, limited drops and socially responsible brands. These segments expect brands to engage them where they are online, visually and with values that align with their own. That's shaping everything from our product design to our retail and marketing strategies.

How do you envision travel retail and luggage products evolving in an increasingly digitally-native world?
We're seeing a clear shift toward e-commerce, with brands enhancing digital experiences through personalisation, virtual try-ons, and smart recommendations. Luggage itself is becoming "smarter" with integrated tech like GPS tracking, USB charging, and digital locks. Sustainability and customisation are also key: consumers want eco-conscious, stylish products tailored to their needs. Hybrid retail models that blend immersive offline experiences with online convenience, supported by influencer-driven engagement, will define the next chapter of travel retail. **BT**

Global meets local

A flagship property for IHG in Saudi Arabia, voco Riyadh was the first hotel in the country from the voco brand, and aims to set the tone for the brand's intended expansion across the region. We chat with **Mark A. Allaf**, general manager at voco Riyadh and regional general manager at IHG Hotels & Resorts, to learn more

The voco brand is relatively new in relation to some of IHG's legacy names. What makes voco Riyadh both true to this brand as well as Saudi culture?
It captures the brand's DNA – reliability, charm, and thoughtful service – while weaving in the rich traditions of Saudi hospitality. The hotel blends a modern, vibrant aesthetic with warm, personalised service that mirrors the kingdom's values of generosity and care. From Arabic-inspired dining experiences to authentic cultural touches in design and service rituals, voco Riyadh creates a sense of familiarity for international travellers while ensuring local guests feel their heritage is celebrated within a global hospitality framework.

How is IHG aligning its growth strategy with Saudi's Vision 2030 objectives?
We are expanding our footprint across the kingdom with diverse brands that serve different market needs – from luxury to midscale. At the same time, we are investing in talent development through Saudisation initiatives and training programs that equip the workforce for future opportunities. IHG is committed to playing a leading role in shaping the hospitality sector, supporting infrastructure growth, and elevating Saudi Arabia as a world-class destination.

How does voco Riyadh fit into IHG's larger brand strategy and vision?
Riyadh is not only the capital but also the beating heart of Saudi Arabia's economic and cultural transformation. For IHG, it is a strategic hub where business, government, and international tourism intersect. voco Riyadh plays a vital role in this ecosystem by addressing the demand for upscale accommodation that is modern, versatile, and guest-centric. It bridges the gap between international expectations and local authenticity, ensuring IHG remains at the forefront of Riyadh's evolving hospitality landscape while reinforcing the city's positioning as a global business hub.

What sets your property apart?
voco Riyadh distinguishes itself with a holistic experience that combines design, dining, and cultural storytelling. Architecturally, the hotel's contemporary spaces are infused with Arabian accents, creating an atmosphere that feels modern yet grounded in tradition. Culinary concepts range from international menus to authentic Saudi cuisine, offering a journey through flavours. Cultural programming – such as curated art and locally inspired service rituals – enhances the sense of place.

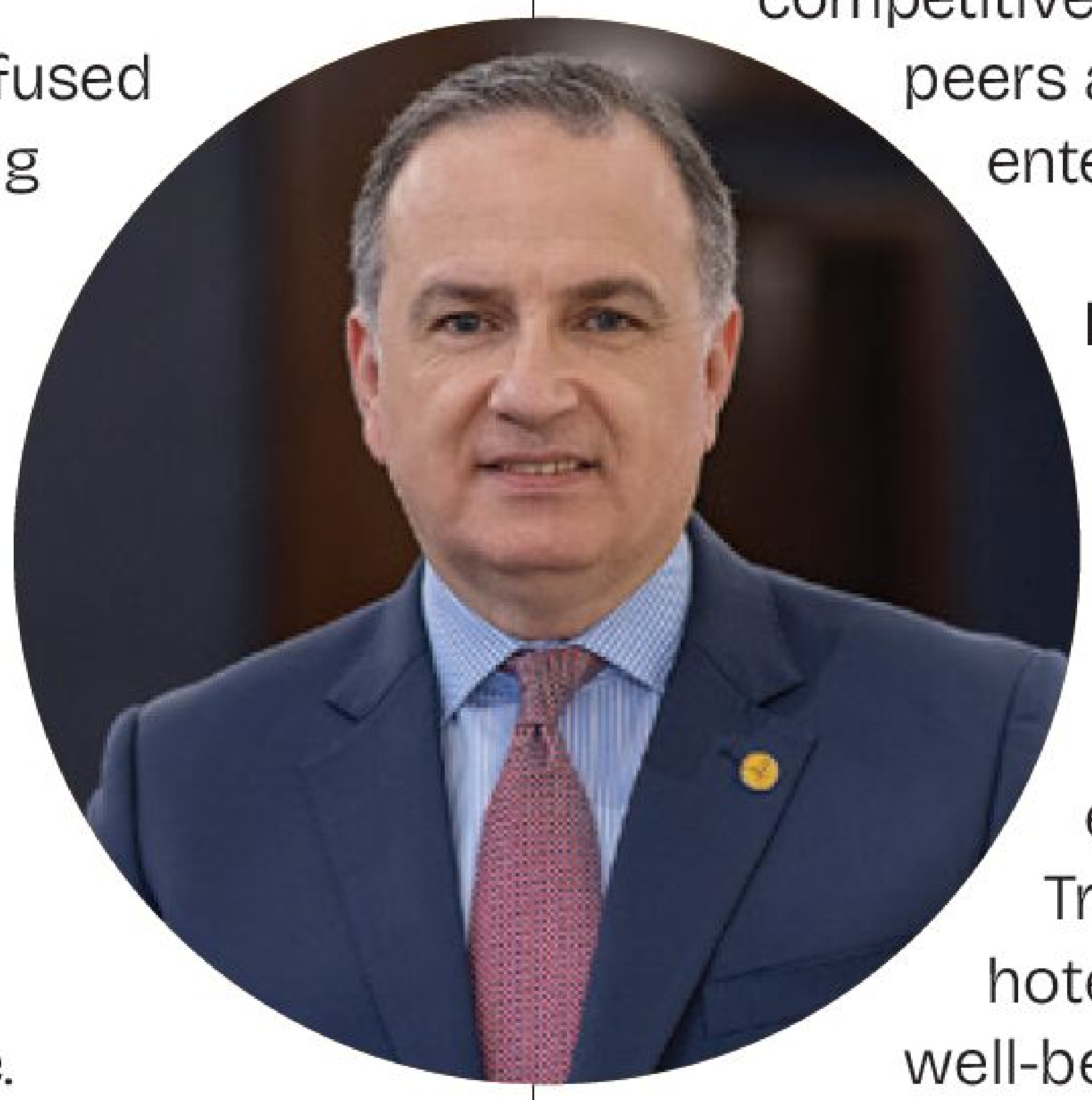

IMAGE SUPPLIED

The city is a business hub and emerging leisure destination. How do you cater to this?
The hotel's design and services are purposefully versatile. For business travellers, voco Riyadh offers state-of-the-art meeting facilities, high-speed connectivity, and proximity to key commercial and government districts. For leisure guests, the property provides spacious rooms, lifestyle-driven dining, a luxury spa, and family-friendly amenities. This dual approach ensures that guests – whether attending a conference, traveling with family, or exploring Riyadh's cultural landmarks – find an environment tailored to their needs. Our aim is to make voco Riyadh the preferred choice for both business efficiency and leisure relaxation.

Do you see increasing demand from domestic travellers and regional markets?
Absolutely. They are playing an increasingly important role in our business mix, reflecting both the kingdom's growing middle class and enhanced connectivity across the Gulf. Business and leisure trips within Saudi Arabia are rising, fuelled by government investments in infrastructure and tourism initiatives. We cater to these markets with family-friendly offerings, local cuisine, and culturally aligned services. While international demand continues to expand, domestic and regional guests remain a core pillar of our strategy and performance.

How do your lifestyle offerings enhance your competitiveness in the city?
They are key to differentiation in Riyadh's competitive hotel market. Soul Wellness Spa provides holistic rejuvenation, while diverse dining venues satisfy both international and local culinary expectations. Family-friendly facilities broaden our appeal beyond corporate stays, capturing the growing domestic leisure segment. Together, these experiences transform voco Riyadh from a place to stay into a place to live, relax, and connect. This holistic approach enhances guest loyalty and ensures we remain competitive against both regional peers and international brands entering the market.

How important are wellness and culinary experiences?
They're no longer peripheral – they are central to the guest experience in Saudi Arabia. Travellers increasingly seek hotels that contribute to their well-being, whether through fitness facilities, spa treatments, or healthier dining options. Culinary experiences, particularly those celebrating Saudi culture alongside global cuisines, have become a major differentiator. At voco Riyadh, both wellness and dining are core pillars of our positioning, helping us meet evolving guest expectations while aligning with the kingdom's vision of promoting quality of life and lifestyle tourism.

IHG has made global commitments to sustainability. How are these applied?
Sustainability is integral to daily operations. Our "tread light" philosophy is embedded through energy-efficient systems, water conservation initiatives, and waste-reduction practices. We prioritise locally sourced ingredients in our kitchens, reduce single-use plastics, and ensure recycling is standard practice. We also invest in training colleagues to promote sustainable behaviours that extend beyond the hotel.

What's in the pipeline?
We aim to enhance digital innovation, expand tailored wellness programmes, and further integrate cultural storytelling into the guest journey, while deepening our focus on sustainability and operational excellence. **BT**

WORDS
MOHAMED MAHMOUD
Cluster General Manager, InterContinental
Residences Dubai Business Bay & Kimpton Dubai

OPINION

IS LOYALTY IN HOSPITALITY OUTDATED – OR JUST UNDERVALUED?

A leader with a 25-year tenure at a single company - who has inspired many of his team to work towards longevity too - this hospitality expert has a fresh take on loyalty culture in the modern age

IN TODAY'S rapidly evolving workplace, the idea of long-term loyalty can feel counterintuitive. Career paths are more fluid than ever, especially among the next generation of hospitality professionals. Job-hopping is no longer a red flag, it's often viewed as a strategic move for development, exposure, and growth.

Yet, after more than 25 years of having worked within a single organisation myself, I can say with confidence: loyalty is not obsolete, it is simply misunderstood.

Loyalty today is not about staying in the same role or resisting change. It's about choosing to grow within a shared purpose. My career has taken me across cities, functions, and challenges. But through each chapter, I've been able to evolve with the support of an organisation that continuously invested in my development and leadership potential.

That is the future of loyalty. Not static tenure, but dynamic progression within a values-driven culture.

Younger professionals entering the industry today, particularly Gen Z and younger millennials, are often seeking meaning, autonomy, and the ability to make an impact early in their careers. They value flexibility and transparency, and rightly so. The traditional markers of loyalty, length of service, linear promotions, and stability, no longer reflect their career priorities.

BUT WHAT IF WE REDEFINED LOYALTY THROUGH A MORE RELEVANT LENS?

Modern loyalty is mutual. It thrives in environments where people are heard, empowered, and encouraged to innovate. When young talent feels trusted and supported, they don't need to look elsewhere to progress, they can do it from within. That internal mobility is key to retention and relevance.

As leaders, we have a responsibility to foster that kind of environment. One that encourages ambition without requiring exit. One that rewards curiosity, supports risk-taking, and sees potential as something to develop, not contain.

Trust is foundational. Throughout my leadership journey, I've learned that consistent communication, active listening, and clear values are what create high-performing and loyal teams. Loyalty cannot be demanded - it must be earned through culture, clarity, and care.

LEADING WITH A DIFFERENCE
Award-winning leader Mohamed Mahmoud believes that the idea of company loyalty isn't a dead concept: it just needs to be adapted with a mindset suited to the modern age

‘Modern loyalty thrives in environments where people are heard, empowered, and encouraged to innovate’

The impact of long-term commitment extends far beyond retention metrics. When individuals stay and grow within a team, they bring institutional memory, emotional intelligence, and a deep understanding of both operations and culture. That level of continuity drives service excellence in a way no short-term strategy can replicate.

But this isn't a call for rigid structures or expectations of lifelong careers. It's a reminder that loyalty and agility are not mutually exclusive. Hospitality leaders must design roles and cultures that allow people to move between departments, across disciplines, and into leadership, without needing to leave.

We must shift the conversation from how to "keep" people, to how to inspire them to stay. That means creating meaningful career journeys, recognising individual goals, and offering mentorship that aligns with evolving ambitions.

For me, the decision to stay was not based on comfort or convenience. It was based on the opportunity to continuously contribute, to lead with authenticity, and to shape a culture where others could also build long-term, fulfilling careers.

Loyalty, when built on shared purpose and opportunity, is far from outdated. In fact, it may be one of the most powerful advantages in shaping the future of hospitality, an industry rooted in relationships, trust, and consistency.

In a world defined by change, the ability to cultivate sincere and lasting commitment may be one of the most relevant leadership skills we can bring forward for the next generation. **BT**

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

BUSINESS QUEEN

Yi-Hwa Hanna chats with **Sakshi Nath**, an F&B and beauty entrepreneur with two award-winning brands under her lead

Q&A

You're the co-founder of Dubai's acclaimed Trèsind Studio – one of the region's most renowned dining destinations, and the first Indian restaurant in the world to receive Three Michelin Stars. What are the three key factors it takes for a business to excel on not just a regional but a global scale?
Hard work, dedication, and consistency are fundamental, but the true differentiator is having a strong, aligned team. You can have a great idea but without people who share your vision and put in the same dedication, it's difficult to sustain growth beyond one market.

You're also the founder of Queens Beauty Lounge – a business that was clearly born from your personal passions, since you also pursued a professional beautician course before launching! Why was it so important for you to have that level of expertise before launching your beauty business?
I've always believed that if you want to run a business well, you need to truly understand it. Taking a professional beautician course gave me hands-on experience and allowed me to connect with the work on a deeper level. It wasn't just about opening a salon; it was about creating something I was personally confident in.

Like hospitality, F&B and beauty are both such service-led industries. What, in your opinion, is the most important factor that can make or break a customer experience?
Consistency. Customer experience is everything. Whether in dining or beauty, people should feel genuinely welcomed and their experience should be consistently excellent. That consistency is what has kept us thriving for over a decade.

Do you travel often for work? If so, what does your business travel usually involve?
Yes, frequently. I travel between Dubai and Mumbai regularly, and now to the US and Europe as we expand. These trips allow me to explore global concepts, attend leading food and beauty events, and participate in industry awards, all of which enrich our knowledge and offerings.

How do you typically choose where to dine when you're overseas? Do you have any favorite restaurants across the world?
It depends on the cuisine I'm in the mood for. I often rely on trusted ratings, personal research, and recommendations from our chefs because they know chefs globally. Apart from our own Trèsind Dubai food, I absolutely love discovering great food when I travel. Some of my global favourites include Zuma in New York; Nobu at the Fairmont Monte Carlo; Roka, Chinatown and Hakkasan in London. And Baoli in Cannes is one of my absolute favourites. Dining out is one of the best parts of travel for me.

3 things I always pack in my suitcase

- **Comfortable sneakers**
- **Casual wear**
- **Swimsuit**

Packing Tips

- **Pack light**
- **Focus on essentials**
- **Always keep an extra set of clothes in your cabin bag**
- **Avoid placing valuables in checked luggage**

How important are B2B events and trade shows for your beauty business, and why is this so?
Very important. Such events keep us informed about the latest technologies, trends, and products, enabling us to maintain innovation and stay ahead in a competitive industry.

As a beauty expert, what are your three beauty must-haves to ensure that you look good everywhere you go, even during your travels?
A high-quality sunblock, under-eye patches (I prefer the ones from Doctor Barbara Sturm and 111SKIN), and a nourishing hand and body lotion – essentials to keep my skin protected and hydrated on the go.

What are the top three dream destinations on your bucket list?
The Bahamas, Brazil, and Iceland to finally witness the Northern Lights, which has been a dream for years.

What's the first thing you do when arriving at a new destination?
I plan extensively in advance. For me, choosing the right hotel in a central location is key, so that attractions, dining, and cultural experiences are easily accessible.

What is your earliest memory of a holiday as a child?
A family trip to Kashmir before tourism declined in the region and the area became disturbed. I remember its beauty vividly; it remains a cherished childhood memory with my parents and siblings.

What is your go-to choice of in-flight entertainment?
I'm a loyal Emirates flyer and often watch their documentaries or explore new film releases on ICE – it's the perfect mix of entertainment and learning.

How do you usually spend your frequent flyer miles?
As an Emirates Gold member, I typically use my miles to upgrade flights, making long journeys more comfortable and productive. **BT**

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

The Elevator Pitch

Business Traveller Middle East gives **Rabih Beaino**, general manager of Kimpton KAFD Riyadh by IHG, five minutes to pitch his property to prospective guests

WELCOME TO Kimpton KAFD Riyadh. We're opening our doors with something unexpected for the city: Riyadh's first Kimpton, part of IHG Hotels & Resorts – a lifestyle brand known around the world for mixing stylish design with a warm, personal touch.

You'll find us right in the heart of the King Abdullah Financial District, one of the most exciting neighbourhoods in the capital. The location is buzzing with life, and we've made sure Kimpton KAFD Riyadh fits right into the rhythm of the city.

The hotel rises across 16 floors with 212 rooms and suites, all designed to feel both elegant and personal. Small touches matter to us: yoga mats in every room, luxury bedding, and a minibar stocked with local favourites. They are the kind of details that make you feel at home, but in a way that's still a little special. And if you're working while you're here, you'll appreciate the direct skywalk access to the metro and the corporate hub just steps away.

ABOVE FROM LEFT: The lobby at Kimpton KAFD Riyadh; Rabih Beaino

LEFT: Hotel exterior

BELOW: The living room in a high floor bedroom suite

> 'If you're working while you're here, you'll appreciate the direct access to the metro'

Food and drink are at the heart of Kimpton KAFD Riyadh, and each of our venues has its own character. Botanica is our leafy escape for all-day dining, alive with greenery, natural light, and flavours designed for sharing. The Vinyl Ember sets the stage for a lively grill experience, where fire, flavour, and music come together in a space built for lingering. Ziya, our elegant lobby lounge, glows with golden light and a menu of gourmet salads, pizzas, and sandwiches crafted with global inspiration. By the pool, Kanza offers a serene retreat where shared plates and lantern light transform every evening into a treasured moment.

Beyond dining, Kimpton KAFD Riyadh offers a sun-drenched outdoor pool deck, a fully equipped health club, and flexible event spaces ideal for gatherings both large and intimate. Each space reflects Kimpton's philosophy of making hotels feel like vibrant community hubs rather than just places to stay.

What truly sets us apart is the Kimpton spirit – a heartfelt, human-centered approach to hospitality that turns every detail into a moment of connection. Our aim is not only to host guests, but to make them feel seen, welcomed, and inspired.

Kimpton KAFD Riyadh is more than a hotel. It is a new way to experience the city. Whether visiting for business, leisure, or a little of both, we invite guests to discover a destination that blends bold design, vibrant dining, and genuine hospitality in the heart of Riyadh. **BT**

IMAGES **NICOLAS DUMONT/KIMPTON KAFD RIYADH BY IHG**

Explore.

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24 HOURS

Almaty

WORDS **YI-HWA HANNA**

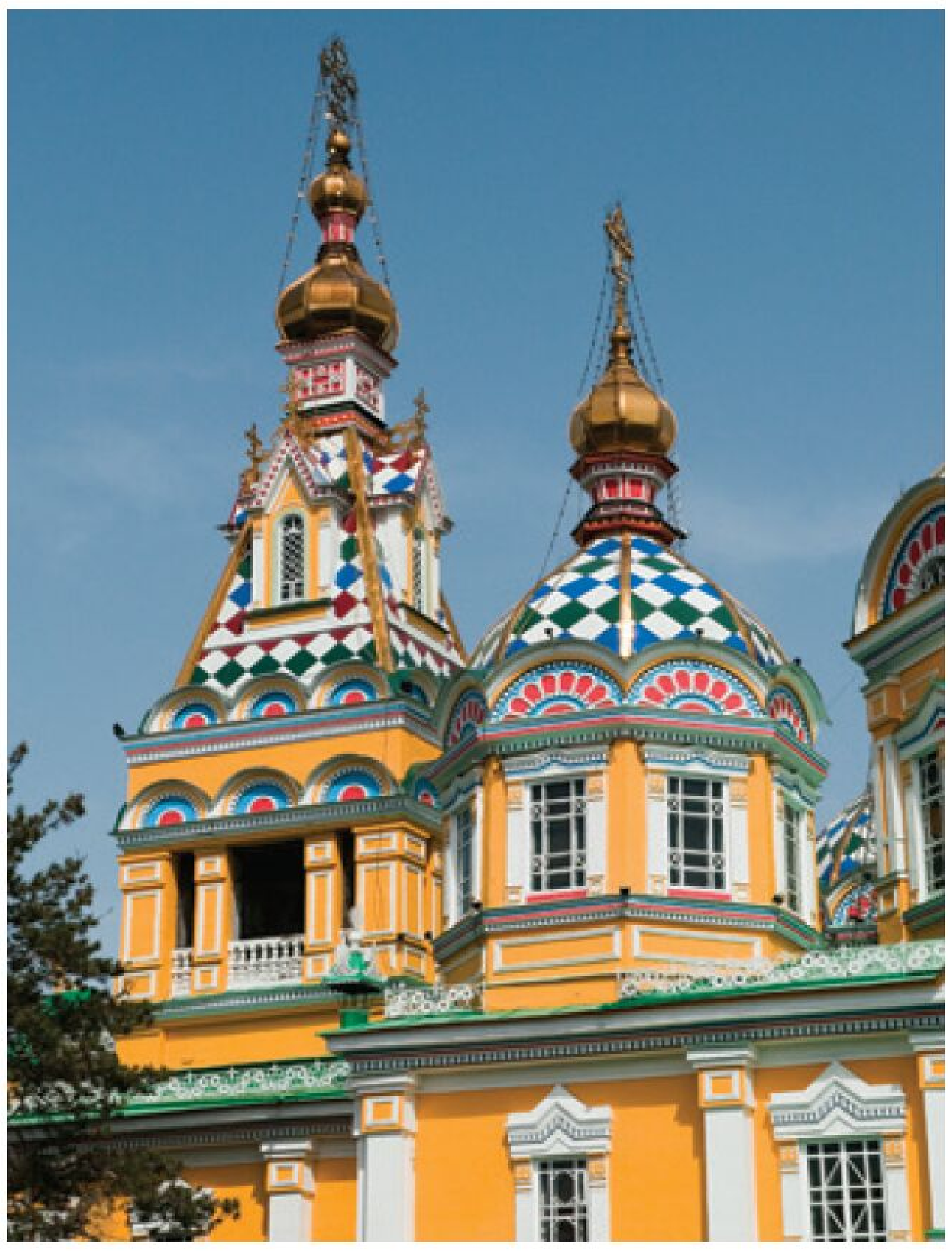
The financial, cultural, and historic heart of Kazakhstan, Almaty is a great base for a first taste of this Central Asian gem

THE LARGEST CITY in Kazakhstan, Almaty may not be as futuristic as the country's capital, Astana, but it is a great first port of call for first-time visitors. Filled with culture, interesting food, and easy access to incredible nature, it's a treasure trove of discoveries.

IMAGE **DANIL MASLOV/GETTY IMAGES**

Explore ALMATY

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA



ABOVE FROM LEFT: Ascension Cathedral; Charyn Canyon **BELOW:** Historical centre **BOTTOM:** Shymbulak

MORNING

Begin your day in Paniflov Park – a verdant urban park in the east-central part of town, in Almaty's Golden Quarter. The park honours the Paniflov's 28 Guardsmen – soldiers that were said to have died during World War II in the Battle of Moscow, and the park's entrance features a monument honouring the fallen. This spot is also known for its greenery, with various types of trees including oaks, elms, aspens, maples, poplars, pines, and firs across its 18 hectares. Here, you'll also find the Ascension Cathedral. Built entirely of wood in 1904, it's survived an earthquake and features a striking, colourful Russian Orthodox design. Nearby, you'll also find the Kazakh Museum of Folk Musical Instruments, which contains more than 1,000 instrumental items, including 60 types of Kazakh national music instruments, with some even dating to the 17th century. There are plenty of cafés nearby from which to grab a coffee and a breakfast item, like a Kasha (porridge), or one of the many popular Kazakh pastries and breads, like Baursak or Selpek, which can be eaten with honey, jam, or cheeses like Balqaymaq or Irimshik (which Baursak is typically stuffed with).

AFTERNOON

When you're ready for a more substantial meal, consider a visit to Auyl – a restaurant found in Almaty's Medeu region. Found in a stunning nature-rich locale in the foothills of the Tian Shan mountains, this place came about as an experimental creative and culinary collaboration between architects, artists, and artisans. It serves 'neo-nomad' cuisine inside an adapted former yurt, and its dining and beverage offering is so special that the restaurant has made its way onto the prestigious World's 50 Best Discovery guide. If a deeper and more active immersion in nature is what feeds you, consider doing a day-trip excursion to one of the incredible spots within a reasonable drive from the city instead. Almaty is a fantastic jumping-off point for tours of the surrounding areas, some of which can be completed in a half-day or single day. Shymbulak's lush forests and powdery ski slopes (depending on what season you go in) are just a 50-minute drive from the city, while Charyn Canyon - a national park with a stunning gorge likened to Asia's Grand Canyon (or Mars!) is a three-hour drive away. A little further out, between four to six hours drive away, you'll find Kaindy and Kolsai lakes. Both are mountain lakes that offer spectacular views, while the former in particular is known for its unique "sunken forest" of trees that remained submerged and petrified after an earthquake in 1911. If you prefer to stay closer to town, however, there's still plenty to do. You can make use of the city's modern metro system - the only metro system in Kazakhstan, opened in 2011 - and make your way to Republic Square. There, you can see the Independence Monument. There also a number of shops here, making it a great place to pick up a souvenir - and the mayor's residence is also found in this area. If food shopping fascinates you more than cultural souvenirs and handicrafts, take a 13-minute drive or 45-minute walk away from Republic Square, to the Green Bazaar. Right next door to Rahat Chocolate Factory – one of the oldest confectionary producers from Kazakhstan dating back almost 70 years, that makes its chocolate and candies fresh in the facility – Green Bazaar is one of the city's most well-known markets. Here, you'll find everything from animal products such as meat and dairy, to nuts and spices, fruits, clothes, and crafts for sale. If you want to catch a great view of the city from above for sunset, consider heading to Kök-Töbe - a hill that has various restaurants and viewing platforms. You can take a cable car ride from the city centre up to the top of Kök-Töbe hill - a ride that will take you six minutes.

EVENING

Navat and Alasha are both restaurants in the city known for their high-quality, authentic, traditional Kazakh cuisine, and will both make for interesting spots in which to have dinner. Classic Kazakh dishes to try include beshbarmak (boiled meat in broth, served over pasta-like dough), lagman (an Ughyur-origin dish with hand-pulled noodles), and kazy (a sausage made of horse meat) - then wrap up with chak chak (a sweet, honey-coated deep-fried dough, like a doughnut).

Air Astana and flydubai fly direct from Dubai to Almaty, and Qatar Airways flies there direct from Riyadh.

> ‘Shymbulak’s lush forests and powdery ski slopes are just a 50-minute drive from the city’

IMAGES BOB KRIST/GETTY IMAGES; VERA, TACHE/ADOBE STOCK

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

Wellness by design

We chat with **Nerio Alessandri**, CEO and founder of Technogym, on the rising appeal of well-being is hospitality, and crafting the gym of the future

STEP INTO A majority of hotel gyms and chances are, you'll see Technogym machines and gear there. The Italian brand is one of the most ubiquitous in the world when it comes to the leading suppliers of gym and fitness equipment found in luxury hotels. "Today, we're proud to be featured in 41 of *Forbes'* top 50 hotels," Alessandri says. It's not just its function that stands out: it's also the design, with more than 60 international design awards to the brand's name. "Design has always been a distinctive mark of Technogym. Since the beginning, we have invested in an in-house style centre, and we have collaborated with top designers such as Antonio Citterio," Alessandri adds.

Technogym has a robust digital ecosystem, and offers in-room solutions for hotels and residences, he explains, providing guests with convenient and engaging fitness experiences within their private spaces. These solutions combine design, technology, and digital content to create a seamless wellness experience. "[Our] partnership with Anantara Hotels is a great example of how we're bringing wellness directly into the guest room. Through the Minor Hotels app and in-room entertainment systems, guests can access curated zero-equipment workouts. It's convenient, private, and helps guests maintain their wellness routines while traveling. For hotels, it's a powerful game-changer that enhances guest satisfaction and aligns with the growing demand for wellness tourism." The brand's recent launch - Technogym Connected Dumbbells - are an innovative smart solution for home and hotel fitness: "They feature adjustable weights from 2kg to 24kg, built-in sensors that track reps and performance, and Bluetooth connectivity with the Technogym App. The idea came from the need for compact, intelligent strength training tools that fit modern lifestyles. The development process involved ergonomic design, AI algorithm creation for movement tracking, and rigorous testing to ensure durability and safety. It's a perfect blend of form and function."

Smart technology is at the heart of the brand's evolution: "The Technogym Coach uses AI to deliver personalised training based on user goals and biometric data. We've also introduced Technogym Checkup, which assesses physical and cognitive metrics to generate a 'Wellness Age' and guide each user through a personal training experience. By integrating wearables, apps, and equipment into a seamless ecosystem, we're able to offer a truly personalised wellness journey. It's not just about fitness, it's about prevention, longevity, and enhancing quality of life."

Turning the hotel gym into a memorable part of the guest experience, Alessandri says, comes down to three essentials: flexibility and accessibility, so every guest can use the space; personalisation through smart technology, ensuring tailored fitness that meets individual needs; and a focus on thoughtful design that reflects the hotel's brand. Wellness, he notes, is now a core expectation: "It's no longer a nice-to-have; it's a must-have". Alessandri predicts a future defined by hyper-personalisation, with tech and AI driving regenerative, purpose-driven experiences throughout every part of the guest journey.

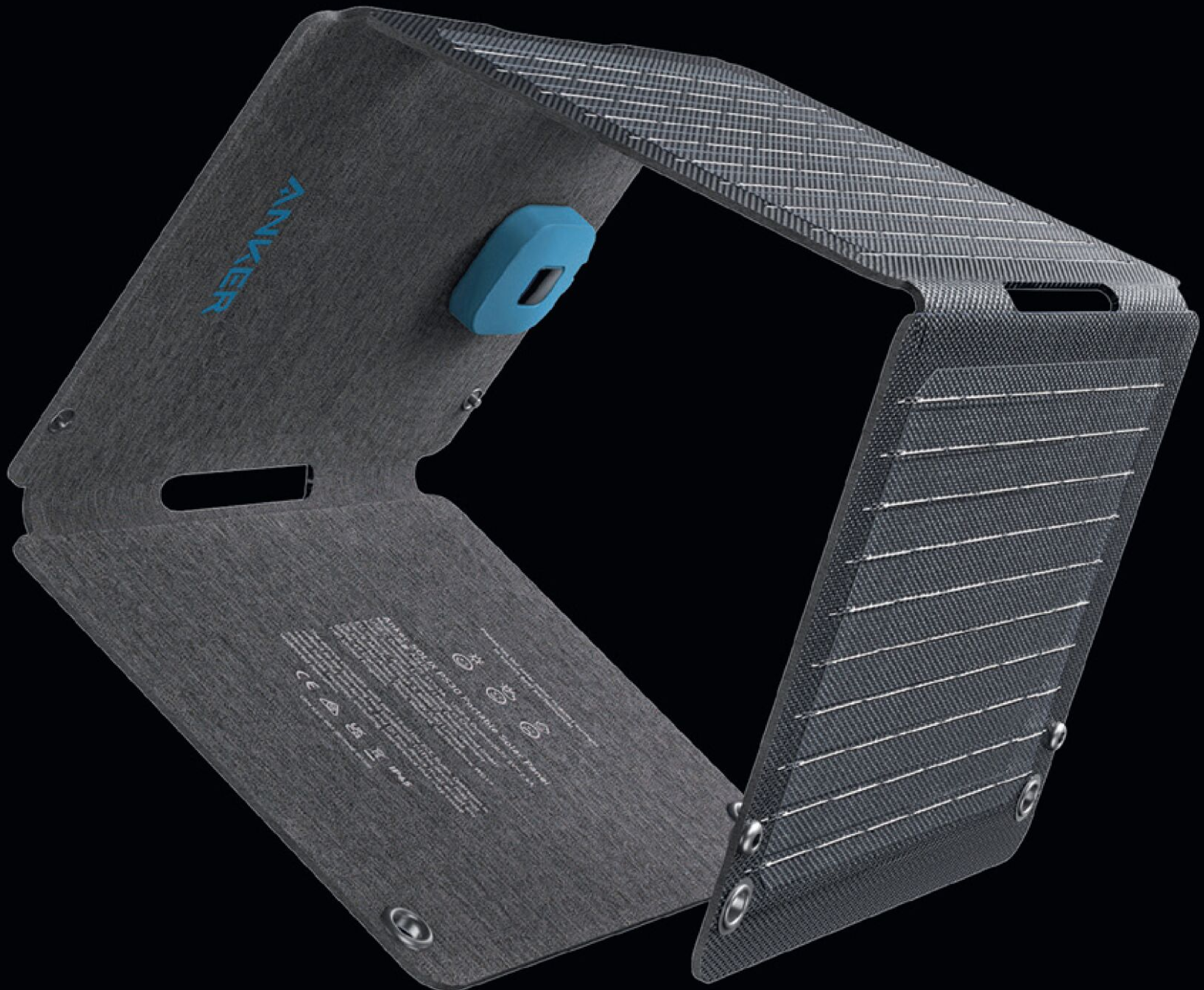
IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

The spa, elevated

ANANTARA SPA and leading skincare brand ELEMIS have launched a new partnership that brings ELEMIS's clinically-backed, high-performance treatments to Anantara spas across prime destinations including Vienna, Amsterdam, Dublin, Marbella, Nice, Budapest, Amalfi, Tenerife, and Lisbon. Fusing Anantara's holistic, tradition-inspired approach with ELEMIS's science-driven innovation, guests can enjoy a seamless blend of signature hands-on therapies and results-focused treatments – including ELEMIS EXPERT TECH FACIALS powered by six advanced technologies, and select spas offering state-of-the-art skin analysis, plus customisable facials, expert body treatments, and the latest in skin wellness technologies promising radiant results. By combining local authenticity with global excellence, it sets a new standard for luxury spa experiences and wellness journeys.

Green gadgets

From more durable devices to tech that facilitates our carbon goals, David Phelan suggests five eco-friendly travel gizmos to add to your collection



Anker SOLIX PS30 Portable Solar Panel

AED 348

Chinese electronics manufacturer Anker has become a leading brand when it comes to charging and power packs. Now, it's letting users charge gadgets directly from the sun with this portable solar panel. Simply unfold the panel while outdoors, plug in your phone or other device via the USB-A and USB-C charging connectors, and watch them slowly recharge back to full health. It's weather-resistant enough to be used in the rain, and designed so that you could attach it to a backpack while on a hike, for example. It isn't the most glamorous-looking device, and needs a decent amount of sun to work effectively, but it folds flat for travel and is useful for those trips when you know you're going to be away from power sockets longer than you'd like.

Apple Watch Series 10

From AED 1,984

Apple's latest smartwatch has many useful features and gets bonus points for its carbon neutral design when paired with selected straps. The case is made entirely of recycled aluminium – or 95% titanium in the pricier models – and Apple also uses 100% renewable electricity. On the travel side, configurable watch faces display the correct time in your home country while away, and the GPS function allows you to access directions on your wrist, instead of holding your iPhone out in a sketchy part of town. Plus, it warns you if your heart rate is unexpectedly high or low, and allows you to check blood oxygen levels or take an ECG. At night it can warn you of possible sleep apnoea, while the alarm clock function can wake you with a vibration so you never miss a flight.

Larq Bottle PureVis 2

From AED 592

We all know that disposable water bottles aren't great for the environment, but reusing the same one can become unhygienic. Enter: the Larq Bottle PureVis 2. Larq uses ultraviolet light (UV-C) emitted from the cap to kill bacteria, ensuring both bottle and water are clear of contaminants like E. coli or salmonella. The 20-second sanitising procedure takes place every couple of hours, but you can also start a cycle at any time or turn this feature off when you're not using the Larq. It also has a built-in filter to remove chlorine and improve the taste of the water. What's more, it can track your water drinking habits and encourage you to set goals if you're not drinking enough. A rechargeable battery powers the cleaning cycles and lasts for two to three weeks between charging.

Nest Learning Thermostat

AED 1,089

When you're travelling, it's easy to forget to switch off the heating before leaving home. But the Nest thermostat knows whether you're there or not and adjusts accordingly. It does this by detecting the presence (or absence) of your mobile phone. You can also override settings from the app, wherever you are. This means you could turn on your radiators as soon as the plane touches down, so it's nice and toasty when you arrive. The Nest is also smart enough to ensure your home never gets so cold that pipes freeze. It can also study your routines and learn your preferences, turning off to avoid overshooting your desired temperature. All of this means it helps to save energy and encourages eco choices. You'll also get a monthly update on how much energy you've saved.

Fairphone 5

AED 2,480

The latest Fairphone is built to last, with a five-year warranty and software updates promised until 2031. Fairphone also makes phones that can be easily repaired, rather than thrown away – the battery can easily be swapped out for a new one. Plus, it focuses on recycled materials and says its cobalt, silver, lithium and gold are mined fairly. On the functionality side, the 6.46-inch display is OLED and its 90Hz screen has a faster refresh rate than the iPhone 16 for smooth scrolling. There are two 50-megapixel cameras on the back and another on the front, and Gorilla Glass 5 protects the screen if you drop it. It comes in four colours, including one with a transparent back so you can see the removable battery and other eco-friendly components nestling inside.

IMAGES SUPPLIED

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

FINE DINING

Historic flavours, reimagined

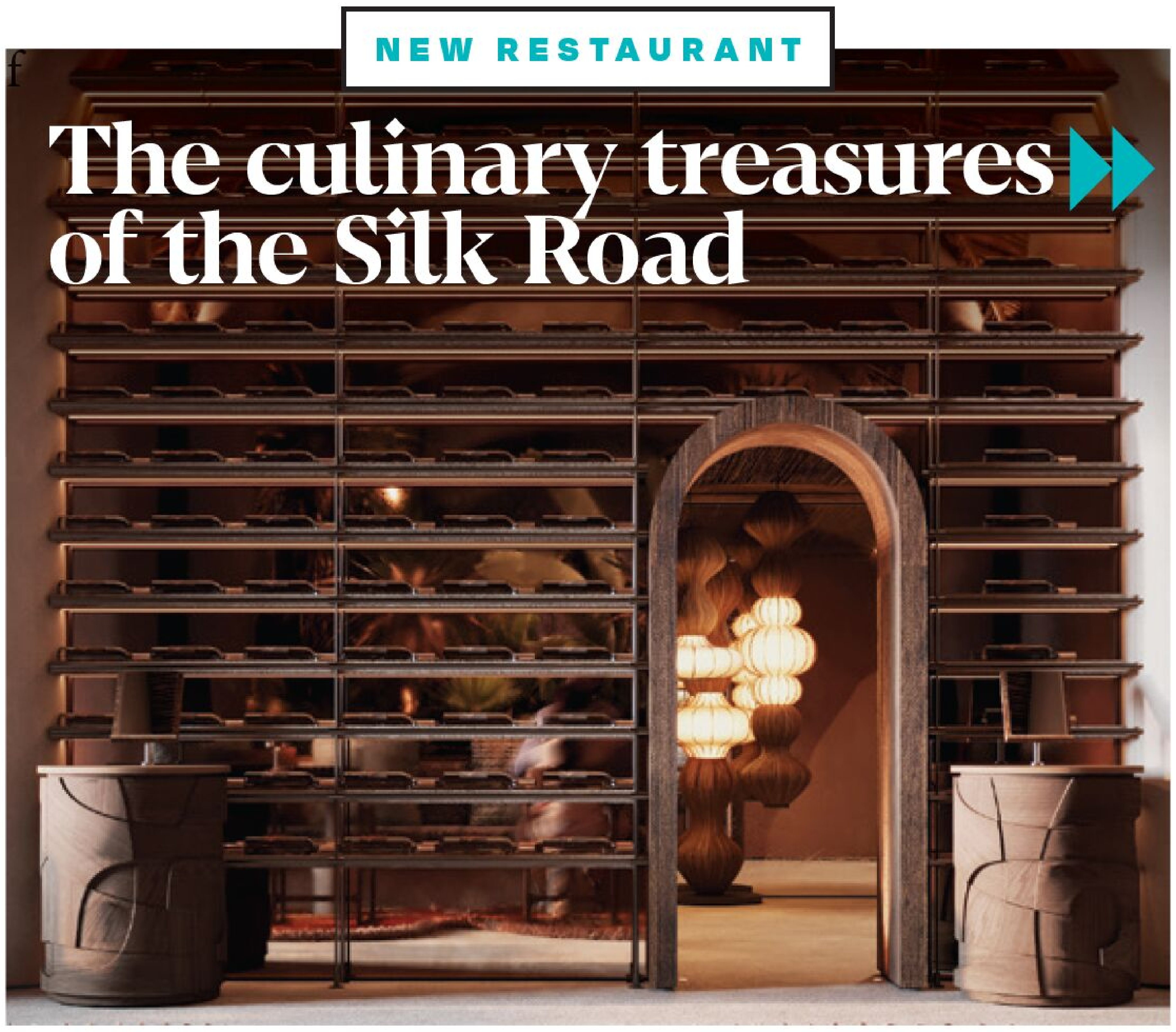
CELEBRITY CHEF, restaurateur, cookbook writer, *MasterChef India* judge and filmmaker Vikas Khanna is bringing his Michelin-worthy touch to JA Lake View Hotel through a new quarterly dining series. Taking place at Kinara by Vikas Khanna - one of the hotel's most coveted restaurants - *Forgotten Flavours* will reinterpret treasured culinary traditions from across India. The first edition will kick off on 3 October with Utsav – Festivals of India, marking both Kinara's sixth anniversary along with the start of the new programme.

Guests will experience a multi-course menu curated by the acclaimed chef, with hand-picked drink pairings. Each evening will also feature live storytelling, a meet-and-greet with the chef, and a bespoke keepsake menu highlighting the heritage behind each dish.

Themes of future editions of the series will include The Royal Kitchens of India, Peninsular Cuisine, Nomadic Food Traditions, and Forgotten Grains. Only 60 seats are available for each edition of *Forgotten Flavours*. Bookings can be made via JA Resorts & Hotels.

NEW RESTAURANT

The culinary treasures of the Silk Road



MADINAT JUMEIRAH, Mina A'Salam has welcomed SANA: a contemporary Uzbek restaurant that invites guests to embark on a journey along the Silk Road through bold flavours, rich culture, and modern hospitality. Part of BIK Hospitality Group, by Boris Kofman and Alexander Kolobov, SANA draws inspiration from the legendary Restaurant Uzbekistan in Moscow. Led by chef Glen Ballis, whose global experience spans Melbourne, Moscow, London, and Asia, the menu will feature authentic Uzbekistan dishes such as Plov, Shashlik, wood-fired meats, and Olat Somsa and Chebureki pastries. Within its standout interiors, guests will find elegant dining spaces, a floating terrace and a hidden bar called Moon.

Oct 6: the opening date of the highly-anticipated NYC Italian restaurant Carbone at Atlantis The Royal, Dubai

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

FASHIONABLE FOOD

Armani/Caffé expands its menu

ONE OF THE MOST CHIC dining destinations inside Dubai Mall's Fashion Avenue, Armani/Caffè has recently refreshed its menu with some brand new dishes. Among the new items are fresh salads including Rucola e Carciofi (rocket, pickled artichoke and truffle Pecorino) and Bocconcini (mozzarella bocconcini with mixed lettuce, tomatoes and olives), as well as some introductions to the pasta and risotto section including Ravioli Ricotta e Spinaci, a new signature dish of Risotto Armani Milano, and Rigatoni al Tartufo. Fresh from the oven, the new Pizza Prosciutto e Funghi adds another Italian classic to the line-up, while the main course menu now includes the Filetto di Manzo – a Black Angus beef tenderloin medallion served with mashed potatoes and mushroom ragout. The dessert selection has also been enhanced with 100% Cioccolato (chocolate mousse, cremaux and cocoa nibs) and the Torta Al Miele premium honey cake, alongside sharing desserts like a trio of Gran Tiramisù in classic, raspberry, and pistachio variations. A new series of flavoured lattes is also available.

ARMANI/CAFFÈ

THE BAG

Power performer

Piquadro and Ducati come together for a bold, limited-edition innovation-focused collaboration

IN A TRULY ITALIAN demonstration of design and performance, earlier this year, accessories brand Piquadro came together with legendary motorcycle company Ducati to create a line of sleek, performance-inspired travel items. The collaboration includes two "commute backpacks" in a roll-top design, made out of weatherproof fabric, available in bold red and black. Also available are two polycarbonate trolley suitcases in red and black, plus a limited-edition slim hard-cabin trolley, made of anodized aluminium with a semi-matte finish, and ultra-quiet double wheels. Only 300 pieces are available. **From AED 1,220.**

DUCATI
DUCATI

THE WATCH

An ode to Saudi Arabia

In celebration of the recent 95th National Day of Saudi Arabia, Breitling Middle East released a new limited edition Chronomat Automatic GMT 40, exclusive to the kingdom. Limited to just 95 pieces, the Chronomat features a striking green dial complemented by elegant white Indian numerals. A tribute to travel, the all-purpose sports watch is powered by the Breitling Caliber 32, the GMT complication features a 24-hour scale, allowing the user to easily track a second time zone and instantly distinguish between day and night. Set in an all-steel case, this COSC-certified chronometer boasts an impressive 200m water resistance and offers a power reserve of approximately 42 hours.

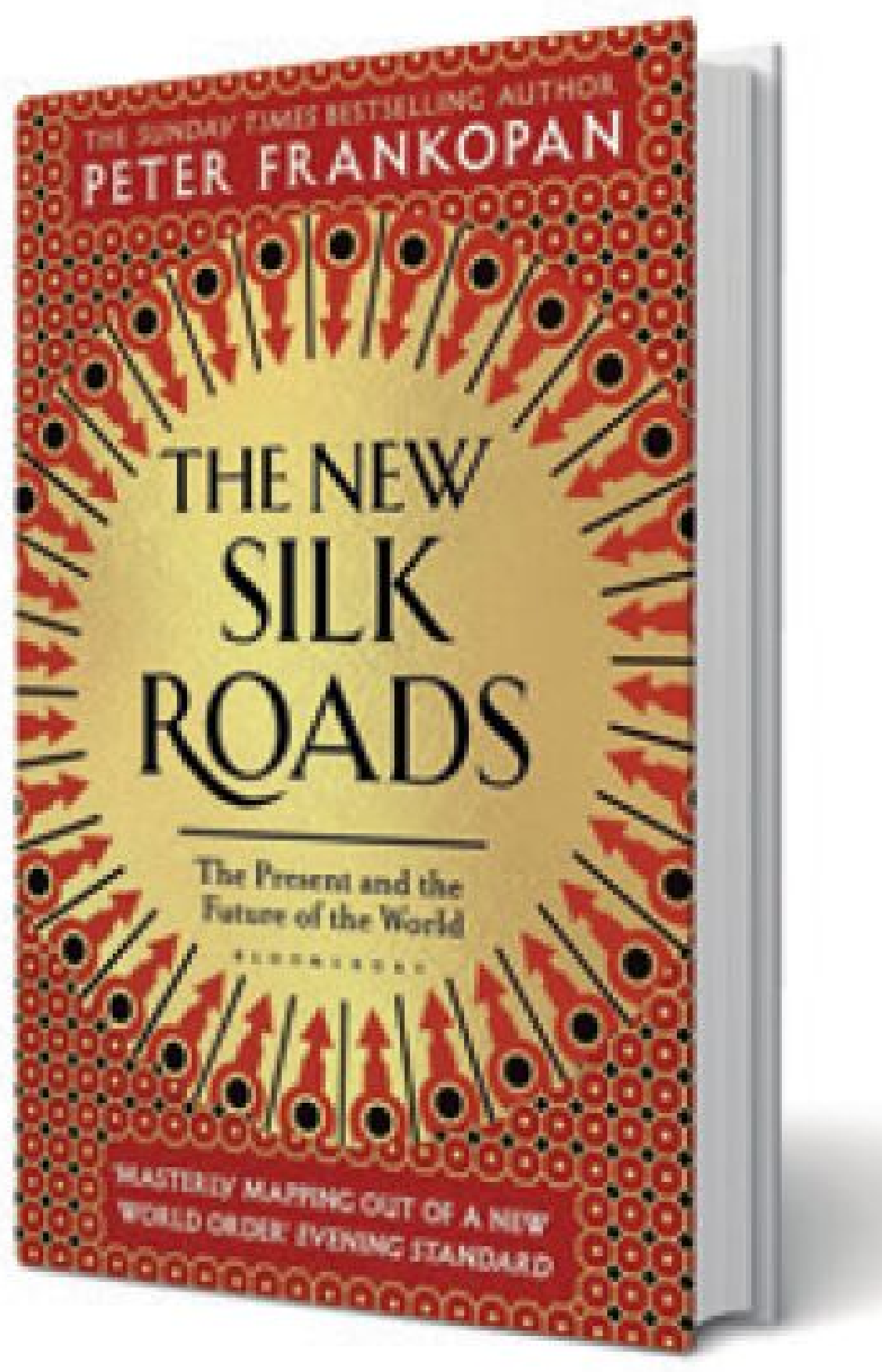
BREITLING
1884
GMT
CHRONOMETER
CHRONOMAT
45
15
30

IMAGES SUPPLIED

WORDS
NIVEA SERRAO

READ

The New Silk Roads: Dispatches from a Shifting World by Peter Frankopan


THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
PETER FRANKOPAN
THE NEW SILK ROADS
The Present and the Future of the World
BLOOMSBURY
'MASTERLY MAPPING OUT OF A NEW WORLD ORDER' EVENING STANDARD

THIS FOLLOW-UP to Frankopan's 2016 title (*The Silk Roads*) sees the historian offer a compelling, on-the-ground look at the shifting balance of global power, tracing how trade, investment, and diplomacy are redefining the influence in the 21st century, from the Gulf all the way to China. Frankopan's dispatches revealing why the future of commerce, culture, and politics will be written along these revitalised routes make it a sharp, timely, and deeply relevant read. **AED 53; amazon.ae**

LISTEN

Design Matters
with Debbie Millman
TED

Design Matters with Debbie Millman

NOW CELEBRATING its 20th year of broadcast, this long-running podcast series sees Millman, a noted designer, writer, artist, and educator, interview luminaries from across the fields of design, art, literature, and culture, exploring how they think, work, and live. Each episode offers timeless and thought-provoking insights into the power of creativity to shape our world. **Available on Spotify.**

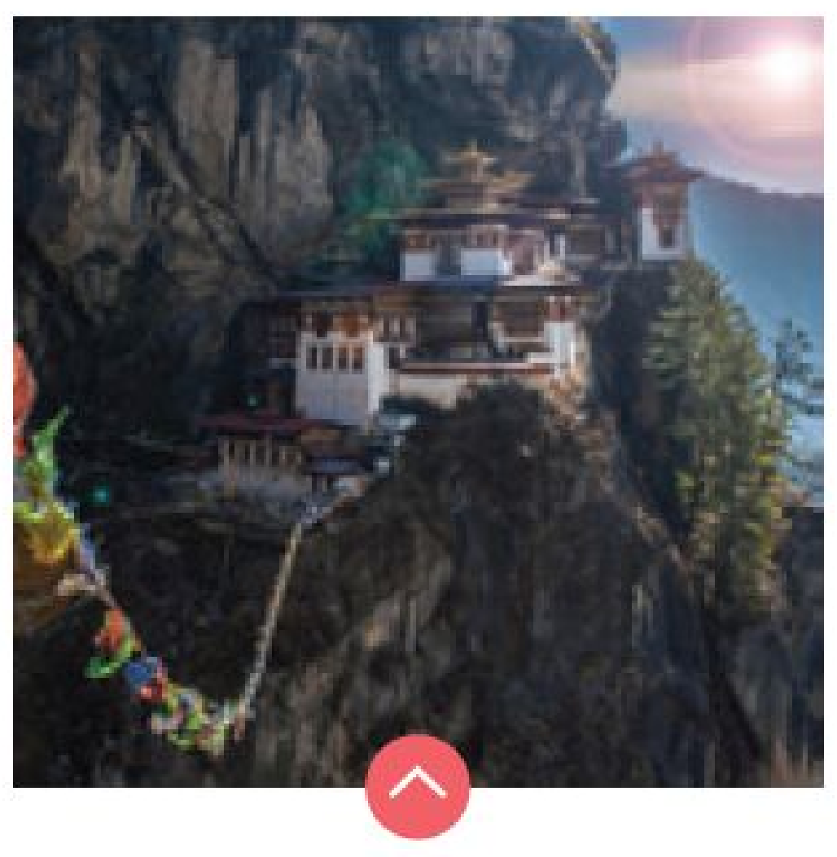
WATCH

Black Rabbit

Succession meets *The Bear* in this TV series, which hit Netflix on 18 September. Jason Bateman (*Ozark*) and Jude Law (*Eden*) play a pair of brothers who disagree over plans for their family's restaurant, which has now become a hangout for New York City's elite. Expect plenty of messy inter-familial drama set against the bustling backdrop of the Big Apple itself.

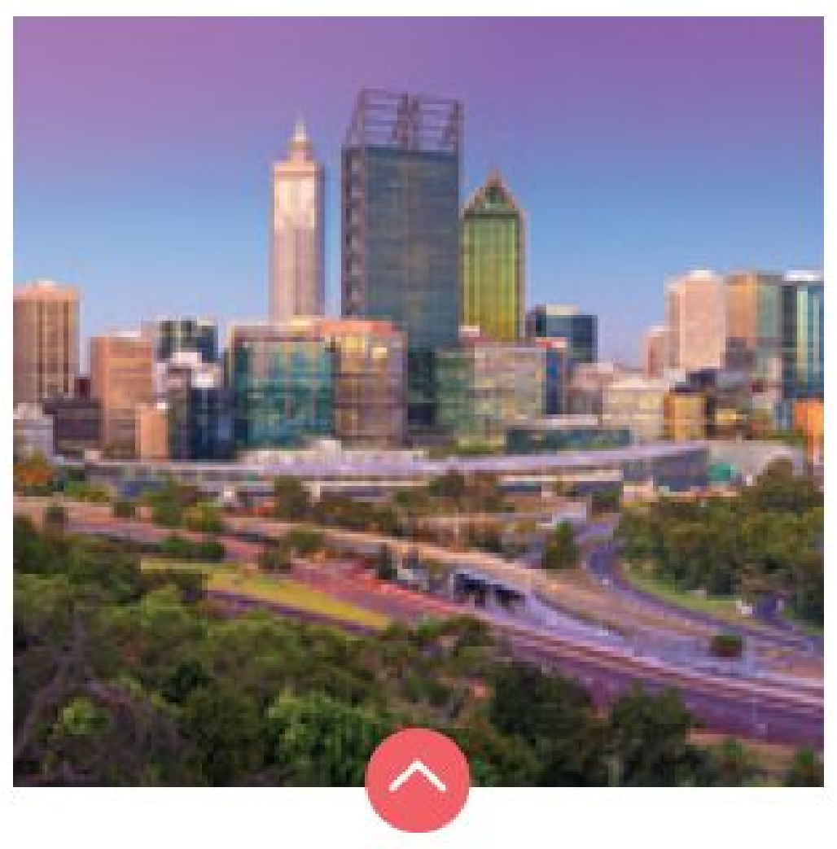
CULTURAL CALENDAR

OUR PICK OF EVENTS TAKING PLACE AROUND THE WORLD



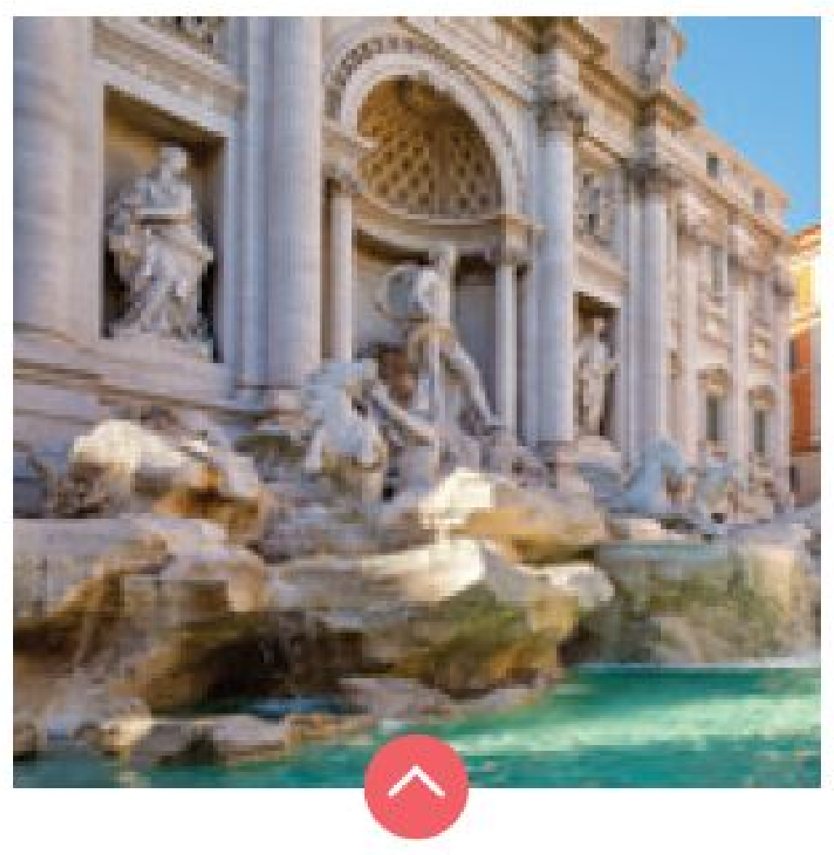
Thimphu Tshechu, Thimphu, Bhutan
2-4 October

The autumnal festival is a dazzling showcase of masked dances, sacred rituals, and storytelling rooted in centuries-old tradition. Locals and visitors gather in vibrant costumes to celebrate their devotion and community in the heart of Bhutan's capital. It's a rare chance to witness the country's cultural heart, framed by its scenic Himalayan setting.



WWE Crown Jewel, Perth, Australia
11 October

The Saudi-set wrestling event will travel overseas for the first time as it touches down on Australian soil. Featuring a blockbuster lineup of wrestling superstars, high-octane match-ups, and unforgettable drama, it promises electrifying entertainment for wrestling fans worldwide. This particular edition features John Cena's (*Peacemaker*) much-anticipated final pay-per-view performance, marking it as an epic sporting spectacle in every sense.



Rome Film Fest, Rome, Italy
15-26 October

Deep in the heart of the Eternal City, this annual film festival celebrates its 20th year with a programme that blends glamour and accessibility, offering global premieres, industry dialogues, and masterclasses for die-hard cinephiles and regular movie lovers alike. This year's edition will open with a screening of Italian filmmaker Riccardo Milani's latest feature, *La Vita Va Così*.

IMAGES **SUPPLIED; JOHANNES, RUDI1976, KMIRAGAYA/ADOBE STOCK**

SPONSORED CONTENT

Uptown Muse

A creative playground for those in the know – and in love with beauty – **SO/ Uptown Dubai** is the ultimate address for savvy travellers craving bold aesthetics and elevated service

FOR THOSE WHO TRAVEL not just to see new sights or to work, but also to be inspired, SO/ Uptown Dubai is a revelation – a sophisticated urban sanctuary where art and bold design permeate every moment. Tucked inside the glistening Uptown Tower, this hotel remains one of Dubai's best-kept secrets, quietly redefining the city's hospitality scene for those truly in the know.

Step inside and you'll understand: SO/ Uptown Dubai is more than a place to sleep. It's a living gallery, where avant-garde art, couture-driven interiors, and the city's dynamic energy collide. From the moment you enter the kaleidoscopic lobby – a space filled with geometric patterns, natural tones, and museum-quality installations – it's clear this is a destination curated for travellers with discerning taste and a passion for creativity. The lenticular colums that greet you upon entering are moving works of art that climb 10m high, using technology to come alive and infuse the space with a sense of nature and futuristic appeal combined.

The hotel's 188 rooms and suites are masterclasses in design, each one a space offering panoramic views over Dubai Marina, Bluewaters, Jumeirah Islands, and the shiny, ever-evolving city skyline. The interiors reflect inspiration from renowned visionaries like Christian Lacroix and Viktor & Rolf, fusing comfort with visual drama. Think bold colour palettes, statement contemporary furnishings, sleek marble bathrooms, and bespoke details that blur the line between art and living. Expansive windows magnify Dubai's skyline, transforming each stay into a private viewing of the city below.

FOR THE BON VIVEUR

Dining here is also an experience in itself. Guests can revel in innovative cuisine and theatrical presentation at Citronelle, where Asian cuisine isn't just a meal option but an excerise in artistry – displayed beautifully through its 14-piece handcrafted dim sum menu. If you're a fan of French patisseries and viennoiseries, Uptown Brasserie is a venue you won't want to miss, with the hotel's French chef whipping up some of the most certifiably authentic pastries in the city at breakfast – before it turns into a classic French brasserie later for lunch and dinner Celeste, meanwhile, is a venue that can serve up stellar views alongside live music, while Savant's swanky lounge draws a chic crowd for sunset drinks and after-dark conversation. On the seventh floor, poolside venue Lazuli offers a refreshing escape with Mediterranean bites and craft beverages. The property has also recently opened the doors of its latest F&B offering: fine dining restaurant Lana Lusa.

The sense of artistry found here extends to its wellness and leisure offerings, too. The hotel's contemporary-chic spa is designed for serenity, with bespoke treatments that soothe and rejuvenate beneath streams of natural light. The pool scene is playful, surrounded by sculptural loungers in splashy pops of colour, from which to enjoy its all-day sunshine. Fitness enthusiasts train in style at the state-of-the-art gym, which, like every part of the hotel, doubles as a visual treat.

Business travellers and creatives alike will appreciate the flexible meeting spaces and chic ballroom, with cutting-edge technology supporting everything from intimate workshops to lavish events at a variety of clever spaces that can host up to 1,000 guests. And if you're in the mood to host your own private celebration, the hotel's multi-functional venues accommodate everything from art shows to gala parties.

Despite its grandeur, SO/ Uptown Dubai retains a sense of exclusivity and discovery. Unlike mega-resorts and other business-ready properties, it offers a more curated, boutique-style experience – it's a hidden gem waiting to be found and cherished by those who appreciate the finer, quirkier things. Service is attentive yet discreet, with the team ensuring every need is met, from artistic room amenities and in-house dining, to private airport transfers and VIP event access.

SO/ Uptown Dubai isn't simply a hotel – it's a collective of creative energy, visual storytelling, and impeccable personal service, all set within one of the city's most iconic new towers. For travellers with a taste for the artful, the architectural, and the unconventional, within easy access of the city's prime business districts, this is the address that turns every stay into a work of art: a hidden canvas, ready to be explored.

IMAGES **SUPPLIED**

Our guide to... tech-forward hotel experiences

LIKE IN EVERY OTHER industry, in 2025, technology in the hospitality world is no longer a novelty – it's a necessity. Cutting-edge tech is reshaping everything from the way we book and check-in or even interact with a property, merging both the online and the offline. Today's traveller may find themselves greeted by a robot concierge at a Hilton, Yotel, or Crowne Plaza; or booking spa sessions through an app at Radisson. You can even visit a fictional hotel through the storytelling-led world of the Hotel Dracula VR Experience, which uses a virtual reality headset to allow you to explore a haunted hotel with up to 50 other people. Augmented reality is also becoming more commonplace, enabling guests at brands like Marriott, Holiday Inn, and others to tour rooms before arrival – or to access on-property entertainment in new ways. For hotels, these innovations aren't just gimmicks – they're part of a growing focus on efficiency, engagement and personalisation, ensuring that technology enhances rather than replaces the human touch. Curious about where to find the most future-forward experiences at high-tech destinations across the globe? These hotels are proving that the future of hospitality is already here.

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

1 HENN-NA HOTEL, TOKYO

The world's first robot-staffed hotel (as recognised in the Guinness Book of Records), Henn-Na makes check-in a novelty with multilingual humanoid androids, holographic butlers, and even a robotic dinosaur at reception. Its rooms feature facial recognition access, smart climate control, and clothing-cleaning machines.

2 HOTEL DE LA VILLE, A ROCCO FORTE HOTEL

At this Roman gem set in an 18th century palazzo, guests can control lighting, climate, and in-room entertainment through intuitive tablets, while using AI to help guests personalise their experience. It also boasts a high-tech holistic health offering and extended reality virtual events spaces. Through its 'Dream Portraits' collaboration with artist Matteo Nasini, it also gave guests the chance to use EEG tech to record their brain activity during sleep, converting the data into sound and 3D-printed sculptures.

3 VIRGIN HOTELS LONDON SHOREDITCH

Virgin's tech-driven personality shines at this property through its "Lucy" app, which empowers guests to control everything – from adjusting the room temperature to ordering late-night snacks and exploring curated local recommendations. In its video-enabled 'Elevator of Dreams', guests and aspiring entrepreneurs can pitch their ideas to Sir Richard Branson and Simon Squibb.

4 SIRO ONE ZA'ABEEL

At Dubai's ultimate wellness-focused hotel, integrated health is taken to the next level. It uses state-of-the-art tech (like the MLX i3Dome, vibroacoustic therapy devices, and cutting-edge Technogym gear) to help guests optimise physical performance and recovery. Its rooms feature wallscreens that can project virtual fitness classes, plus thermoregulated mattresses and smart curtains.

5 W SINGAPORE SENTOSA COVE

At this playful island destination, smart technology meets sustainability through 680+ solar panels that provide it with clean energy. The hotel uses LED lights to create a glowing jungle, its pool has underwater speakers, and guest rooms can be unlocked digitally.

6 9H SHINJUKU JAPAN

This minimalistic capsule hotel's name was inspired by its sleek nine-hour concept: one hour to wind down, seven to sleep, one to refresh. Automated check-in, smartphone-controlled lockers and atmospheric lighting create a streamlined experience – plus you can also get a sleep report, based on the movements recorded in your pod overnight.

7 PENGHENG SPACE CAPSULES HOTEL, SHENZEN

Futuristic doesn't even begin to describe this budget-friendly Shenzhen hotel, where guests sleep in glowing capsule pods fitted with individual entertainment screens and smart controls. Robots take centre stage, serving meals and handling concierge tasks.

8 NH COLLECTION MADRID EUROBUILDING

This hotel is located in the heart of Madrid's financial district, but if colleagues or clients can't join you there in person, its meeting and events facilities offer next-level tech for remote videoconferencing and visual collaboration, for up to 250 people at a time. The lobby's ceiling, projecting 3D images, photos, and videos, features Europe's largest multimedia vault screen. It's so digitally-savvy it introduced the first-ever holographic telepresence system in a hotel, plus an innovative 'Living Lab' concept, back in 2015.

9 ALOFT CUPERTINO

A decade ago, Aloft Cupertino tapped into its Silicon Valley setting with a robot butler called "Botlr," delivering amenities directly to guest rooms. Botlr has since retired, but the hotel still maintains its tech-friendly focus by offering guests digital check-in and mobile keys, electric car charging stations, and functional, ergonomic workstations ready for remote workers, just down the road from the famous Apple campus.

10 YOTEL, NEW YORK TIMES SQUARE

The Yotel brand is all about compact, smart living. In its NYC outpost - surrounded by the more-than-90 digital displays of the iconic Times Square - guests can enjoy its adjustable "SmartBeds," app-based controls, and self-service check-in kiosks. The hotel also has the world's first robotic luggage concierce, YOBOT. By 2027, Yotel's planned outpost in Saudi Arabia's NEOM megacity – the first hotel in Oxagon, which will be the world's largest floating city – promises an even bolder, higher-tech, sustainable stay.

11 HOTEL ZETTA, SAN FRANCISCO

In the heart of SoMa, this creativity-championing hotel is also a playground for tech lovers. Inside, you'll find an interactive gaming wall, video games in its playroom, and Amazon Alexas (and butcher-block workspaces) in its rooms. There's a Peloton in each Well + Away room, and plenty of sleek, productivity-supporting event spaces.

12 ATARI HOTELS

Any hotel by the legendary video gaming company was, of course, going to be an unique, gaming-inspired, storyworld experience. Announced in 2020, a location in Phoenix, Arizona was planned, but news of the concept has since stalled. More recent reports suggest a Las Vegas property could soon be on the way – with rooms inspired by great science-fiction stories, immersive entertainment, mixed-reality programming, e-sports arenas, digital studios, and more.

13 ROVE HOTELS DUBAI

Rove's signature affordability gets an e-sports twist with fully equipped gaming rooms at its Downtown Dubai and The Park locations. Partnered with Playtonia, Razer, and Viewsonic, they feature ergonomic gaming chairs, high-performance PCs, mics and cameras within a powerful gaming rig, and lightning-fast internet.

14 OASIS AVENUE - A GDH HOTEL

Described as Hong Kong's first smart hotel, this property is centrally located in Tsim Sha Tsui – but if you're more interested in exploring the digital world, its Smart Rooms encompass an eco-friendly option, a home theatre pick with a cinema-worthy 95-inch screen, and an esport room with two gaming PCs, a PlayStation 5, VR tools, and an 85-inch smart TV from which you can stream Netflix and YouTube directly – or connect your own devices. The latter also has a smart integrated toilet, and a Service Robot.

15 PULLMAN SINGAPORE ORCHARD

This property's clever "transforming room" concept morphs with the scan of a QR code: beds fold into walls, desks emerge, and lighting adapts to your needs. Turn it into a bedroom, workout studio, or workspace – or unleash its scent library or in-suite spa shower!

16 SHEBARA, SAUDI ARABIA

This solar-powered island resort has brought futuristic luxury and renewable energy-led intrastucture to the Red Sea. Inside its spaceship-like pods (and across the rest of the resort), AI-driven personalisation adapts experiences in real time, from dining to entertainment. It's a blueprint for sustainable, tech-first hospitality.

17 THE CHEDI WADI SAFAR

Set to open by 2026 in Diriyah, one of Saudi's most important cultural destinations, this property combines traditional Najdi architecture with heritage-preserving, environmentally-friendly smart systems. **BT**

IMAGE **COLIN ANDERSON PRODUCTIONS PTY LTD/GETTY IMAGES**

Gillette
BVLGARI
MAN
IN BLACK
BAUME APRÈS-RASAGE
AFTER-SHAVE BALM
LOTION POUR LE CORPS
BODY LOTION
EAU DE PARFUM
Foam
REGULAR
50g
Emirates

Kit mis

Dominic Keith weighs up the case for amenity kits

PHOTOGRAPH **JOHN MELENCION**

Rexona
Tissues
BVLGARI
Lingette Nettoyante
Cleansing Towel
BVLGARI
EMULSION HYDRATANTE VISAGE
HYDRATING FACE EMULSION
BVLGARI
BVLGARI PARFUMS
Earplugs
Emirates
BVLGARI
LE GEMME
OROM
BVLGARI
Baume pour les Lèvres
Lip Balm

or

s?

I must admit that I'm an amenity hoarder. One of our cupboards at home is literally overflowing with all the inflight pouches and airline loungewear I've collected over the years. It has frequently threatened to end my marriage, but, at least for now, the kits are staying.

For those unfamiliar with the term, amenity kits is the official name for those nifty pouches and cases handed out by airlines in premium cabins – particularly on long-haul routes. These typically contain a range of items for inflight use, which can range from a dental kit to eyeshades, toiletries, or a branded pen. As is the case with most amenities that airlines offer, the quality can vary significantly.

My collection comprises several duplicates, which always make great gifts for overnight visitors in need of a toothbrush, skincare, and eye mask. The pouches can also be handy for storing items like pens and cables in drawers at home, or used to transport things like chargers, cables, and earbud cases on your next trip abroad. Small and flimsy kits can even double as purses for loose change on a beach holiday.

That said, amenity kits are a divisive topic. They are loved by many, but criticised by others who see them as wasteful and useless. Are such kits trash or treasure?

LUXURY LINE-UP

Inflight amenities have been a part of air travel since the 1950s, when airlines like Pan Am and TWA would offer passengers across all cabins cotton balls to muffle the sound of the aircraft engines, along with chewing gum to help ease ear pressure during take-off and landing. As time went on, and flights got longer, further items were added to the mix – including razors, sewing kits, combs, and nail files. Other items disappeared: today's casual trainer-clad passengers have little need for a shoehorn. In my view, the more goodies the better!

It was not until the 1980s that amenity kits evolved into the state we find today – limited-edition pouches formed by partnerships with fashion houses and skincare brands. Collaborations often extend to showcasing local artists and products, too. Great examples include Finnair's long-standing partnership with local design house Marimekko to create vibrant cases, Cathay Pacific's collaboration with Hong Kong-based brand PYE for first class pyjamas, and Japan Airlines' link with Shiseido skincare for its first class kits.

Some airlines change their kits every few quarters or so – others keep the same collaboration for years. Qatar Airways, for instance, has successfully partnered with Diptyque for the past three years. (I myself possess 48 of the kits and counting.) Cathay Pacific, meanwhile, recently renewed its partnership with British brand Bamford for its latest first class kits.

Obviously, individual airline budgets play a crucial factor when deciding on the look and contents of an inflight kit. While certain no-frills pouches in premium economy can be produced for as little as US$2 a pop, higher-quality business and first class versions with significantly better materials and toiletries can reach US$40, according to supply chain executives.

Among the higher-end kits, I'm a fan of Emirates' well-stocked first class pouches in collaboration with Bvlgari, featuring 30ml Bvlgari fragrance bottles as well as a deodorant stick – an item missing from the kits of most other airlines (and one that will surely make you more popular among fellow travellers).

In recent years, there have been a flurry of exciting luxury partnerships in the amenity kit world. EVA Air has introduced new Giorgio Armani-designed business class kits, with outbound passengers treated to a black pebble-grain hard case with the designer-branded coin purse inside, while inbound passengers receive a vintage-style bag and matching key tag. Etihad has also partnered with Giorgio Armani and ESPA for its kits.

Delta Air Lines, meanwhile, has teamed up with fashion house Missoni for its Delta One business class passengers. These amenity kits sport the luxury brand's recognisable textured →

PREVIOUS PAGE Emirates' first class and business class amenity kits for men and women, featuring products by Bvlgari, are considered among the best-in-class

IMAGE **JOHN MELENCION**

ungaro
air astana
air astana
air astana
BODY LOTION
LOTION POUR LE CORPS
air astana
Colgate
NET WT 5g (3.3 ml)
ungaro

AIR ASTANA BUSINESS CLASS
The Kazakhstan flag carrier has partnered with brands such as Emanuel Ungaro *(pictured here)* and Moschino for its amenity kits, along with special themed kits for child passengers

→ zig-zag pattern on the exterior, while contents include Grown Alchemist skincare products, a bamboo toothbrush, toothpaste, an eye mask, ear plugs, socks and a pen. Over at China Airlines, its partnership with Moschino marked the fashion house's first-ever cross-industry partnership with an airline, with four unique designs available across the carrier's business and premium economy cabins – complete with exclusive luggage tags.

FANCY FINDS

Teaming up with luxury brands for amenity kits is not a new phenomenon. Back in the day, premium passengers were treated to popular Rimowa-designed kits on airlines including Lufthansa, Thai Airways, ANA, and EVA Air. Sadly, these mini hard-case kits are nowhere to be found these days.

Instead, a whole new industry has sprung up: online trading for these now-elusive collectors' items. Start a search on eBay and you'll find various sellers marketing the mini Rimowa hard cases at about US$150 including shipping.

Nemrut
Kapadokya
Truva

RIGHT: Turkish Airlines' UNESCO Türkiye Series amenity kits, launched in January 2025

BELOW: Etihad's luxury amenity kits in partnership with Giorgio Armani, with ESPA products, launched in February 2024

For rarer or older kits including a Thai Airways Rimowa case in gold, or a Thai Airways first class pouch with La Mer branded skincare, offers can reach a hefty US$500. Price tags even surpass US$1,000 for business class kits from Russian carrier Aeroflot, while further vintage finds include a SAUDIA hard-case amenity box from the early 1970s for US$68 – still fully stocked with its original contents, including a full-size piece of soap, nail clippers and nail scissors.

There are some pieces in my own collection, however, that I would never dream of parting ways with because of the fond travel memories they evoke. These 'special' kits are kept neatly in their original wrappings at the very back of the closet, away from prying eyes.

Such prized possessions include a colourful collection of Thai Airways and Lufthansa first class Rimowa cases, old Cathay first class bags in collaboration with Zegna, vintage Emirates pouches, and quite a few vintage United Airlines kits, including from the early 2000s when the carrier still offered first class.

A MIXED BAG

There is an argument to be made that amenity kits are quite a wasteful perk – and something we could easily abandon for environment's sake. To avoid disappointing collectors, however, airlines have introduced a number of environmentally friendly options.

In 2019, Virgin Atlantic introduced its sustainable 'Goodie Bags' in its Upper Class and Premium cabins. These amenity kits are crafted from responsibly sourced and FSC-certified recyclable kraft paper, saving the airline 945 tonnes of plastic per year compared to its previous kits. Inside you'll find products such as a bamboo toothbrush, recycled paper pens and aluminium tubes – plus REN Clean Skincare toiletries. The airline also collects any unused items from amenity kits to make up future pouches.

When ANA rolled out its premium kits in partnership with UK-based ETTINGER last year, the carrier stressed that the pouches were crafted from natural cotton canvas and recycled materials, with the cosmetics made from organic materials grown on a recycling-oriented farm that does not use pesticides or chemical fertilisers.

BELOW
The 1985 Delta amenity kit

Delta Air Lines
Delta Air Lines
Delta Air Lines
Delta Air Lines
Delta Air Lines
Delta Air Lines
Delta

IMAGES **COURTESY OF TURKISH AIRLINES, ETIHAD, DELTA**

And until several years ago, Singapore Airlines did not offer amenity kits in business class, despite being regarded as one of the world's most premium carriers. Instead, individual products were made available upon request. SIA has since changed tack and now offers amenity kits (in collaboration with New York-based perfumery brand Le Labo), however, these remain on a request-only basis as part of the airline's ESG programme. This seems like a sensible way to avoid unnecessary wastage while still elevating the passenger experience. But most airlines still prefer to proactively offer them so passengers are aware of their existence and can decide for themselves.

When disembarking the aircraft on my most recent flight between Hong Kong and Europe, I still found myself surprised at how many people left the amenity kits behind. I resisted the urge to grab and add them all to my collection at home – my closet isn't big enough! **BT**

DESIGN DEBRIEF

Business Traveller chats with Addy Ng, creative director, design and products (amenities and sleepwear) at deSter, a leading provider of food packaging and serviceware concepts to the aviation and food service industry.

How long have you been designing amenity kits and was this always your dream job?
It's been more than 15 years since I joined the industry. I came from a fashion design background and was designing luxury handbags. I have always been designing for fashion or luxury brands and creating collections of accessories for their retail networks. But in moving to designing amenity kits and sleepwear for airlines, I get to work with so many brands and customers, understanding them and curating one-of-a-kind products, presenting our stories and getting to see them onboard. I am still as excited to work on every project as I was on my first day. I think I am one of the lucky few who gets to do what I love on a daily basis.

How many kits have you designed or collaborated on?
I'm proud of all the amenity kits and sleepwear I have put onboard over the years. You can find my designs on more than 50 airlines across the globe – in all different classes. Going forward, you can test our new Lufthansa amenity kits for the Allegris launch.

From start to finish, how long can it take for a new kit to hit the premium cabins?
A lot of projects can take up to three years before they are onboard. We work with different airline teams, from marketing to procurement, to make sure we cater to all their needs. Finding the right brand, designing, sampling, curating and fine-tuning all the products can take months. Then we need to get the final sign-off from the airline and the brand before production, which could take anything from six to 12 months.

Do customers give you creative leeway?
As to what goes into the kits, there is a lot of research done by the airlines as well as by consultancy firms. There are passenger questionnaires and other data showing what items are most popular and what is most often left behind. I have worked with so many airlines and they are all very different.

Are budgets constrained?
Some are strict on their budget while others might be willing to pay more for a truly original concept. Usually, the Middle Eastern carriers have the highest budgets and more items in their amenity kits.

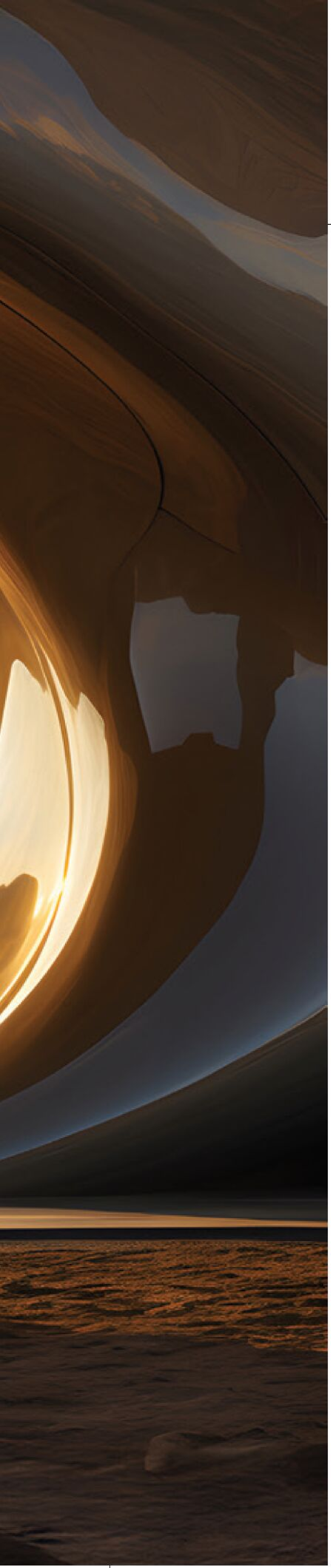
TOURISE

THE NEW, SAUDI ARABIA-HEADQUARTERED GLOBAL PLATFORM IS READY TO DRIVE THE FUTURE OF TOURISM

FOR DECADES, THE GLOBAL TOURISM INDUSTRY has been largely shaped by a series of influential platforms, initiatives, and benchmarking systems that have set the foundations for its growth, innovation, and excellence worldwide. From the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), which has united industry voices and driven policy shifts, to the iconic five-star rating system that helped define quality across hospitality experiences, such structures have elevated standards, enabled global recognition, and fostered collaboration across borders. These efforts have underpinned tourism's status as one of the largest and most dynamic industries on earth, supporting millions of jobs and contributing trillions to global GDP annually. Yet as travel patterns evolve and priorities shift in a fast-paced modern age – one that increasingly prioritises redefined standards of luxury, champions sustainability, and treasures transformational experiences – the sector stands at a pivotal juncture: a time that feels ripe for new leadership, ideas, and benchmarks. Enter TOURISE: a bold new platform under the umbrella of the Saudi Arabia Ministry of Tourism, powered by Saudi Tourism Authority, launched to set a new horizon for global tourism, drive innovation, and shape standards at scale.

With its multidimensional approach – spanning awards, summits, and cross-sector collaboration – TOURISE seeks to build on the foundation of previous global efforts, ushering in a new chapter for the global tourism industry from Riyadh, led by the Kingdom.

IMAGE BASEL/ADOBE STOCK



GLOBAL DISTINCTION
The TOURISE Awards, led by the TOURISE platform powered by Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Tourism, drew thousands of nominations from travellers across the world.

COLLABORATIVE CAPITAL
The TOURISE Summit will take place from 11-13 November in Saudi Arabia's capital, Riyadh.

IMAGE MAXIM/ADOBE STOCK

WHAT IS TOURISE?

Earlier this year, in a major, internationally attended digital press conference, the Minister of Tourism Ahmed Al-Khateeb unveiled TOURISE: a visionary initiative set to redefine global tourism's future. Not only does TOURISE spotlight best-in-class destinations and innovative travel trends, but it also rallies public and private partners from around the world for dialogue, recognition, and innovation.

As a multi-pronged platform for global tourism, TOURISE is intended to foster cross-sector collaboration, policy reform, and knowledge-sharing. While supporting the ambitions of Saudi's Vision 2030, TOURISE was built to accelerate both inbound and outbound travel, spur investment, and position the Kingdom as a hub for global tourism innovation. It brings together tourism leaders with stakeholders from all sectors that – from governments and institutions to tech innovators, retail, entertainment, health and wellness, sports and culture.

The platform's rich agenda, Advisory Board, and global industry connections are aimed at sharing best practices, shaping the future roadmap, while delivering more sustainable and impactful travel experiences. Supported by sector leaders and global experts, it offers a space to debate challenges, set new standards, and highlight emerging opportunities: from Smart City initiatives and digital transformation to aligning with the evolving demands of sustainable, adventure, and experience-based travel – and beyond.

THE TOURISE AWARDS

Part of TOURISE's offering is its awards. As one of its flagship elements, the TOURISE Awards have been positioned as a new global authority within travel and hospitality. These awards recognise excellence and innovation across a carefully curated suite of categories – including Best Adventure Destination, Best Shopping Destination, Best Food & Culinary Destination, Best Entertainment Destination, and Best Arts & Culture Destination.

By spotlighting world-leading destinations and encouraging bold new offerings, the TOURISE Awards are designed to drive higher standards, inspire competition, and shape global travel trends for years to come.

Nominations opened on 2 June 2025 and drew entries from leading destinations and businesses around the world. They will be followed by rigorous judging carried out by an international panel. On 9 September, TOURISE announced its shortlists for each category, featuring both well-established and breakthrough destinations. Winners are set to be revealed in Riyadh at the inaugural TOURISE Summit in November, with the awards highlighting benchmarks for excellence, innovation, and authentic visitor experiences.

THE TOURISE SUMMIT

The TOURISE Summit will take place from 11–13 November 2025 at the King Abdulaziz International Conference Center in Riyadh. The inaugural occasion will mark a new era in tourism leadership and collaboration. The event promises three days of high-level dialogue, workshops, networking, and live experiences tailored for industry leaders and influencers.

Advisory board members, including CEOs, ministers, and experts from all corners of tourism and interconnecting sectors, will convene to tackle the sector's biggest opportunities and challenges.

The inaugural TOURISE Summit will take place in Riyadh in November 2025

"It is intended to foster cross-sector collaboration, policy reform, and knowledge-sharing"

Key themes centre on travel innovation, sustainability, technology-driven solutions, and the transformation of global visitor experiences. As a platform, the Summit highlights Saudi Arabia's strategic investments in infrastructure, smart cities, and digital tools to reshape how the world travels, reinforcing the Kingdom's ambition to welcome over 150 million visitors by 2030.

Alongside awards presentations and plenary sessions, attendees will hear from future-focused panels and explore immersive showcases, making the Summit a must-attend event for those shaping tourism on a world stage.

Through TOURISE, Saudi Arabia will be stepping onto the world stage to unite visionary platforms, prestigious awards, and its summit to drive innovation and excellence. November's event is about more than spotlighting destinations: it sets the agenda for travel's next era, where industry leaders convene to celebrate achievement and lay the foundations for transformational growth. See you there. **BT**

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

THE TRAVEL OF TOMORROW

As emerging technology promises to change the way we live, a new golden age of travel could be on the horizon

ROBOT CONCIERGES. The chance to consider your next potential holiday destination through a virtual reality tour before you make your decision. AI-powered travel bots that can help plan your itineraries for you, or even book your flights and hotel. These innovations once sounded like the stuff of science fiction, but are already a reality, appearing in future-forward early adopters of cutting-edge technology in the travel, tourism, hospitality, and aviation industries. We take a look ahead at the future of travel, from new and upcoming tech to next-gen habits.

IMAGES MIKKELWILLIAM

Out of this world

THE FIRST-EVER TOURIST in space was American multimillionaire Dennis Tito, who travelled to the International Space Station (ISS) in 2011 onboard a Russian Soyuz spacecraft. He spent almost a week there, paying Russian space agency Roscosmos US$20 million for the privilege. In 2006, Iranian-American businesswoman Anousheh Ansari became the first female space tourist. NASA launched a commercial crew programme in 2010 (which the currently-in-development Boeing Starliner capsule is a part of), and in 2020, SpaceX became the first private company to launch astronauts into space and dock with the ISS. While it may be a little while before commercial space tourism becomes more commonplace, this year, billionaire Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin completed its 10th sub-orbital spaceflight as part of its space tourism programme. It lasted 10 minutes and 21 seconds, with its all-female crew (including prominent celebrities) making headlines. Alas, the news was not particularly well-received by the public.

Hospitality expertise from an AI "brain"?

Vienna-based startup chatlyn has raised €8 million in Series A funding, led by Smedvig Ventures, to revolutionise hotel guest communication with breakthrough AI technology. Serving over 1,000 properties worldwide (including luxury brands like St. Regis Mauritius and InterContinental Vienna) chatlyn's platform unifies messaging across 10+ channels, and automates replies in 35+ languages. With a new Dubai office, the company is eyeing regional expansion.

MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z are now among the most influential demographics in travel globally, with both groups increasingly travelling for business as well as leisure. According to a 2024 research study exploring Gen Z travel trends and behaviour, Gen Z travellers typically take an average of three leisure trips per year. They prioritise value and enjoy immersive travel. They are less interested in partying and more interested in seeing sights with unique experiences. Millennials - who are big fans of "bleisure" travel, or travel combining work and leisure - have been reported as taking on average nearly five trips a year, and also tend to lean towards experiential and cultural appeal over material possessions. Both groups are highly digital in their approach to travel, using it for inspiration, research and planning, and booking. They also care about environmental impact.

US$305 billion

THAT'S HOW MUCH value digitalisation in the aviation, travel, and tourism industry was anticipated to create between 2016 and the close of 2025 – according to the World Economic Forum's Digital Transformation Initiative (DTI), for which white papers were published in 2016 and 2017. Factors taken into account were the potential to migrate $100 billion of value from traditional players to new competitors, and the chance to increase profitability through improved operational efficiency, and increased opportunities for revenue generation. From a growing variety of online travel shopping options to the popularity of mobile bookings, or the ability to streamline processes and strategies, improve security, boost personalisation, and use data to not only unlock pain points but also discover what travellers are actually looking for, the possibilities offered to the travel, tourism, hospitality, and aviation industry through digital technology seem boundless.

The era of supersonic travel is inching closer

IMAGINE IF YOU COULD slash the travel time of even your longest journeys in half, while also enjoying a quieter and more comfortable flight experience, all while having less impact on the environment through lower carbon emissions. All of this could soon be possible through the development of commercial applications for supersonic travel. The invention of travel that happens faster than the speed of sound was first demonstrated as far back as 1947, with the first commercial passenger aircraft famously being the Concorde, which began service in 1976. However, the sonic boom generated by such aircraft was disruptive, and cause for potential damage, leading to bans and restrictions that grounded the Concorde and saw the future supersonic jets all but halt. Now, however, companies such as NASA and Boom Supersonic are working on new aircraft that could beat that problem with significant noise reduction and a lighter environmental load (supported by sustainable air fuels), including NASA's X-59 and Boom's Overture. The former is planned to begin testing this year, while the latter – the first supersonic passenger jet since the Concorde – is expected to release a prototype (with only business class seats likely to be made available) before the end of 2025. **BT**

IMAGES CHOMPUNUCH, NADIA_SNOPEK/ADOBE STOCK; TIMOTHY A CLARY/GETTY IMAGES

WORDS **YI-HWA HANNA**

DETOUR DESTINATIONS

ONE TICKET, TWICE THE VALUE? SAVVY TRAVELLERS ARE MAXIMISING EVERY MILE WITH THE ART OF THE SIDE TRIP

As a growing number of modern consumers begin to place a higher emphasis on experiential value – while global economic pressures continue to encourage more people to seek more bang for their buck – today's savviest travellers have discovered a clever hack for maximising their miles: through the art of the side trip.

By piggybacking a secondary stop onto one long-haul trip – through a bit of advance planning, a flexible itinerary, or even a strategic business meeting – explorers keen to see more destinations in less time, for less cash, can get two trips for not much more than the price (and climate cost) of one. As bleisure travel – the appeal of being able to blur the lines between business travel and leisure escapes, or trips that combine some aspect of the two – continues to rise, clever detour destinations are fast becoming more desirable. Sometimes these add-ons are driven by value, at times by spontaneity, and other times by the simple desire to make every journey matter more. Got yet another visit to London, which you visit for business multiple times per year? Why not spice up your personal time between days of meetings with an overnight in Oxford? Or perhaps you could stretch a business trip in Milan into an impromptu weekend in Switzerland: the beautiful canton of Graubünden is just a three-to four-hour drive away, with incredible places to visit including St. Moritz, Davos, and the Engadin Valley. Maybe you're off to New York City or India to visit relatives or friends – and a side quest to Costa Rica or Nepal, respectively, could help you feel like you've had a family visit plus a vacation during one trip. If you're going to East Asia, why not combine a trip to Hong Kong and Macau? The possibilities are as limitless as the world's flight routes. Here are a few bright ideas.

ABOVE: Peratallada is a medieval town in Girona, Spain, just an hour away from Barcelona

BARCELONA → PERATALLADA

One of the most popular destinations in Spain along with Madrid, "Barna" (as the locals call it) is famous for its unique architecture and masterpieces by Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí, including the Sagrada Familia, Park Güell, and Casa Batlló, as well as its excellent food scene. Just don't call it Barça – that nickname refers to the football team FC Barcelona. Once you've seen and eaten your fill, why not take a one-hour train ride to Peratadalla? This beautiful medieval village in Catalonia's Girona province still boasts much of its 11th century charm, with beautifully preserved stone arches begging for an Instagram post, plus a famous local dish to try: arròs a la cassola, or casserole rice. If you visit during October, you may even get to see the Fira Medieval de Peratallada – a medieval fair with a lively market that recreates the past. If you're staying overnight, try booking into a local farmhouse.

BOSTON → SALEM

This historically-rich city on the US East Coast has plenty to see, from major cultural institutions (such as the Museum of Fine Arts and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum), to scientific attractions (such as the Museum or Science, or the nearby MIT campus), educational landmarks (Harvard University is a 10-minute drive away), sporting stadiums (head to Fenway Park to catch a Red Sox game), green spaces (combine a walk in Boston Common with a visit to the *Cheers* bar) – and just a 30-minute 'T' ride away, the city of Salem offers a peek at another major historical moment: the infamous 1692 trials following a period of mass hysteria. The autumn "spooky season" is the most popular time to visit, particularly during its Halloween Happenings event. With Etihad Airways having launched direct flights from Abu Dhabi to Boston in October 2024, it's now easier than ever for GCC residents to pay a visit. Want more? Provincetown and Martha's Vineyard make two more great day-trips from Beantown.

DUBAI → HATTA

This UAE metropolis may be known for its glittering city life and impressive skyscrapers, but just a 90-minute drive away, you'll find one of the locals' favourite nature fixes in Hatta. Take a hike in the majestic Hajar Mountains, kayak and enjoy the serene waters of the Hatta Dam, explore the Hatta Heritage Village, or try a variety of activities at the Hatta Wadi Hub, from mountain biking to wall climbing and more. You can even try your hand at axe throwing. Want to spend the night? Book yoruself into the JA Hatta Fort hotel, or for a more glamping-style experience, the Damani Lodges at Hatta Resorts by Dubai Holding, or Sedr Trailers Resort.

JEDDAH → ALULA

Saudi Arabia's second-largest city, Jeddah has plenty of entertainment for both work and leisure travellers, from the bustling seafront promenade at Jeddah Corniche, to its major sporting events, its thriving food scene, and its heap of culture, from Al-Balad Historic District to modern haunts including teamLab Borderless Jeddah. It is, traditionally, a key entry point for the millions of religious tourists and pilgrims that visit the holy cities of Makkah and Madina each year. It's also a great jumping-off point from which to visit AlUla: one of the country's most treasured tourism destinations. Hop on a direct flight from Jeddah's King Abdulaziz Inernational Airport to AlUla International Airport, and within an hour and 20 minutes, you could be marvelling at Hegra – a UNESCO World Heritage Site with jaw-dropping rock formations; learning about the history of the Nabatean tribes that once lived there; or relaxing in one of its luxurious new hotels.

BELOW: Hatta is one of the UAE's most popular destinations for nature activities, for residents and tourists alike

IMAGES **JOSEMIGUELSANGAR, ALEXEY STIOP/ADOBE STOCK**

LONDON → CANTERBURY

The city of London isn't just a place with a seemingly endless list of things to do within its bounds: it also offers visitors and residents alike plenty of easy day-trips and weekend destinations a quick train ride away. Some of the most famous include Oxford, Bath, Brighton, Cambridge, and the Cotswolds (all of which you can get to within around an hour or just over), but in recent years (in part due to TikTok fame), Canterbury has become an increasingly popular tourism destination for a day or overnight stay from the Big Smoke. The city has so much historical appeal that UNESCO has granted part of it world heritage status, and its location in Kent – sometimes nicknamed the "Garden of England" – makes its medieval 'living history' even more picturesque. You can get there with a 1.5-hour rail journey from the heart of London.

LEFT: Canterbury's historical buildings, pretty waterways, and cobblestone streets are a popular choice for tourists

BELOW: Kawagoe is a historic city in Japan's Saitama Prefecture nicknamed "Little Edo"

OPPOSITE PAGE: Taiwan's Taroko Gorge is famous for its dramatic, river-studded, lush marble canyons

LOS ANGELES → SANTA BARBARA

The City of Angels has plenty of sights to see, from the iconic Hollywood Walk of Fame to its movie studio tours, and the vibey Santa Monica and Venice Beach. If you want to catch a taste of another side of sunny California life while you're there, why not undertake a side-quest to Santa Barbara? You can rent a car and take the scenic route along the Pacific Coast Highway, passing through Malibu and Santa Monica on the way. Santa Barbara has been nicknamed the "American Riviera" thanks to its laid-back feel, along with the Mediterranean climate, and its combination of mountain and ocean views, not to mention Spanish colonial architecture – and there is plenty to see and do once you're there. Visit a museum, take a vineyard tour, go hiking in the trails of the Santa Ynez mountains, or relax on one of its lovely beaches, or hop on a boat to do a bit of whale watching. The channel is such a prime location for diverse marine life that it's been officially recognised as a Whale Heritage Site.

MILAN → BRESCIA

Brescia is a province of Italy known for its sparkling beverages and caviar. It's also where the Pietro Beretta firearms factory has been located since 1526, in the Val Trompia – a nature-rich, beautiful 50km+ valley that was once exploited and plundered by the ancient Romans. There are significant Roman ruins and archeological sites to visit here, along with a number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, as well as a 15th and 16th century art school that also houses a gallery. It's just over a 1.5-hour drive from Milan, and even faster (35-50 minutes) by train, making it an easy and worthwhile day trip or overnighter. Don't forget to try its Casoncelli filled pasta!

川越名物
芋菓子
製造本舗
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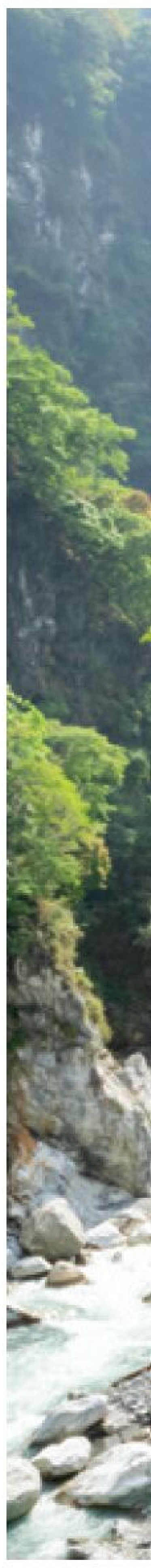

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TAIPEI → TAROKO GORGE

As home to some of the world's largest semiconductor manufacturing companies, and the production of many leading high-tech electronics, the Taiwan capital has become an increasingly popular destination for business travel around its booming tech industry. It's also a key destination for trade shows that often centre around exporting its innovations abroad. While there is plenty of tourism appeal within the city (with a dazzling culinary scene, plenty of shopping, and countless night markets), there's also plenty of nature and history to be discovered through day trips to Yangmingshan National Park, the charming mountain town of Jiufen, or the hot springs of Beitou. But if you have a little more time, take its stellar train system out to Taroko Gorge: just over two hours from the city, you'll find a nature wonderland in Taroko National Park. One of the country's "nine wonders", its vast marble canyons threaded with impossibly blue rivers and hiking trails are nothing short of spectacular – and it's also a great destination in which to learn about the country's tribal settlements and aboriginal culture.

TOKYO → KAWAGOE

Still one of the most sought-after tourism destinations in the world, Tokyo is a place that every keen traveller should visit at least once in their lifetime – but if you're looking to see more on your next visit, while straying from the more popular destinations of Kyoto, Osaka, and Mount Fuji (also helping the country beat the crush of overtourism in these places), why not take a 1.5-hour drive or train ride to Kawagoe? Its Edo-era district is so well-preserved the city has earned the name "Little Edo", and its historic streets and sweets (try the sweet potato specialities) are a lovely step back in time. **BT**

INTERNATIONAL SIDE-STEPS

DUBROVNIK → KOTOR

While flydubai does run direct flights to Tivat, along Montenegro's Bay of Kotor, it also flies to Dubrovnik, Croatia – as does Turkish Airlines. From Dubrovnik Airport, you can take in the stunning sights (or begin a *Game of Thrones* tour) then drive to Kotor within an hour, easily extending the coastal appeal of the Balkans.

ALMATY → ISTANBUL

While Kazakhstan may not seem like the most obvious combination when planning a trip from, say, Dubai to Istanbul, if you're flying Air Astana, it makes sense: the airline's MySTOPOVER programme lets you transform a layover into a chance to discover the country of the great steppe for just US$19, before you fly onwards to Türkiye.

NEW YORK → BARBADOS

If you've ever dreamed of visiting Barbados – the home of Rihanna, a historically-significant distillery, postcard-perfect beaches, and tasty Bajan cuisine – but the long flight time from the GCC has put you off, why not tack it onto your next work or leisure trip to the US East Coast? It's only a 4.5 hour flight from New York City!

QATAR → SAUDI ARABIA

Outside of the UAE, the airports of Qatar and Saudi Arabia are among the busiest hubs in the GCC, with plenty of international flights passing through. Why not expand a visit to Doha, with its rich cultural appeal, with a quick hop over to the kingdom's growing tourism scene? Riyadh is just a 1.5 flight away, and Jeddah 2.5 hours.

LONDON → PARIS

One of the "OG" options for detour destinations, taking the Eurostar from London to Paris is one of the most fun, memorable, and efficient ways to travel from the UK to France. The high-speed rail service takes just over two hours to get from one city to the other, and it's one of the most iconic modern train journeys in the world.

UAE → OMAN

The GCC country of Oman is increasingly becoming known for its immense nature offering, with deserts, mountains, beaches, wadis, and more to see. Hike, bike, swim, see whale sharks, observe turtle nesting year-round, or visit ancient villages. The country is accessible from a four-hour drive or a 1.5-hour flight from the UAE.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

BEANLESS COFFEE, **COCOA-FREE** CHOCOLATE AND PROTEIN **MADE FROM THIN AIR** – THE FUTURE OF FOOD IS FASCINATING, WITH REGENERATIVE FARMING AND FERMENTATION HELPING TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE AND POPULATION GROWTH

WORDS **HANNAH BRANDLER**

→

A potted plant arrives at my table and, for a split second, I worry that jet lag has led to hallucinations. I'm sitting at the Mandarin Oriental's MO Bar in Singapore, sampling its new cocktail menu, The Echoes of Singapore, which includes a section dedicated to future innovations.

Designed to mimic a plant, the inventive mixology certainly provides attractive fodder for Instagram and TikTok, but the roots go a lot deeper – highlighting important issues in a city-state where food security is high on the agenda. 'Plant-ish' is inspired by Singapore's 30 by 30 vision, the city's plan to produce 30% of its nutritional needs locally by 2030 (at the moment more than 90% of food is imported).

Served in a claypot planter from the city's Little India district, the cocktail is a window into the wider global food crisis facing a rapidly growing population, which is set to increase from 8.1 billion to 9.7 billion by 2050.

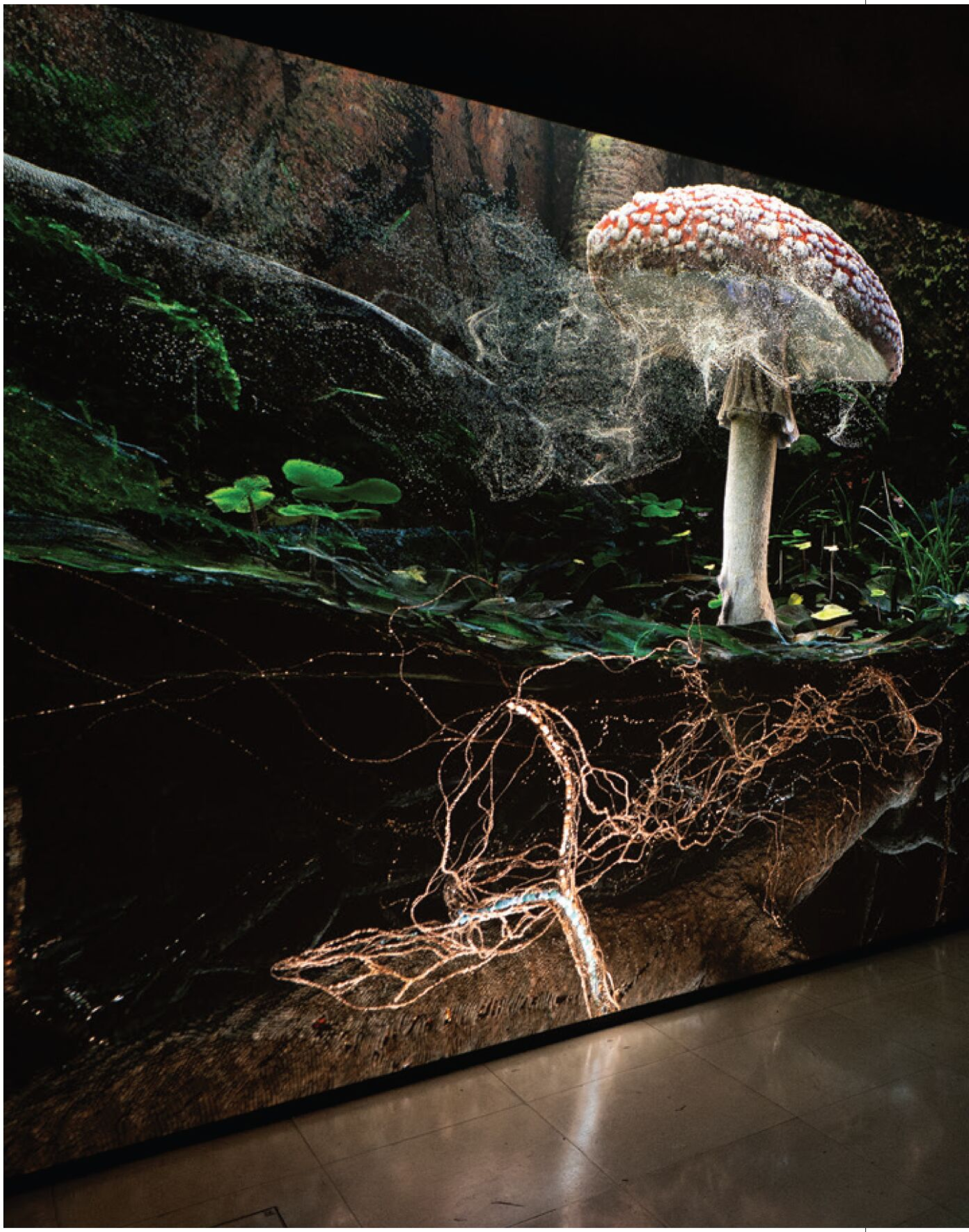
Global food production is both affected by climate change and to blame for it – responsible for up to a third of global greenhouse gas emissions, depending on measurement factors. It's not all doom and gloom though, with companies across the globe future-proofing the industry by considering alternative crops and using groundbreaking technology to develop nutrient-rich products. Here, we look at the challenges at play and the brands saving the planet one bite (or sip) at a time.

APPETITE FOR AWARENESS

Many of us take what's on our plate for granted. One of the main challenges in raising awareness on the subject is simplifying a topic that can be perplexing to the average consumer. Thankfully, a string of exhibitions highlighting food security seek to do just that.

Among these is *SOIL: The World at Our Feet*, a multimedia exhibition that took place at London's Somerset House until 13 April. The exhibition shined a spotlight on the organic material through sensory artworks, photography, film installations and a jam-packed programme of events – from dining experiences to panel discussions and art workshops.

Henrietta Courtauld and Bridget Elworthy, otherwise known as The Land Gardeners, used their expertise in soil health to help curate the exhibition. "We wanted to open people's eyes to the wonder of soil and make people realise it's not just dirt – it's alive and sustains life above ground," they tell me. By making soil sexy, the hope is that people become more invested in its future.

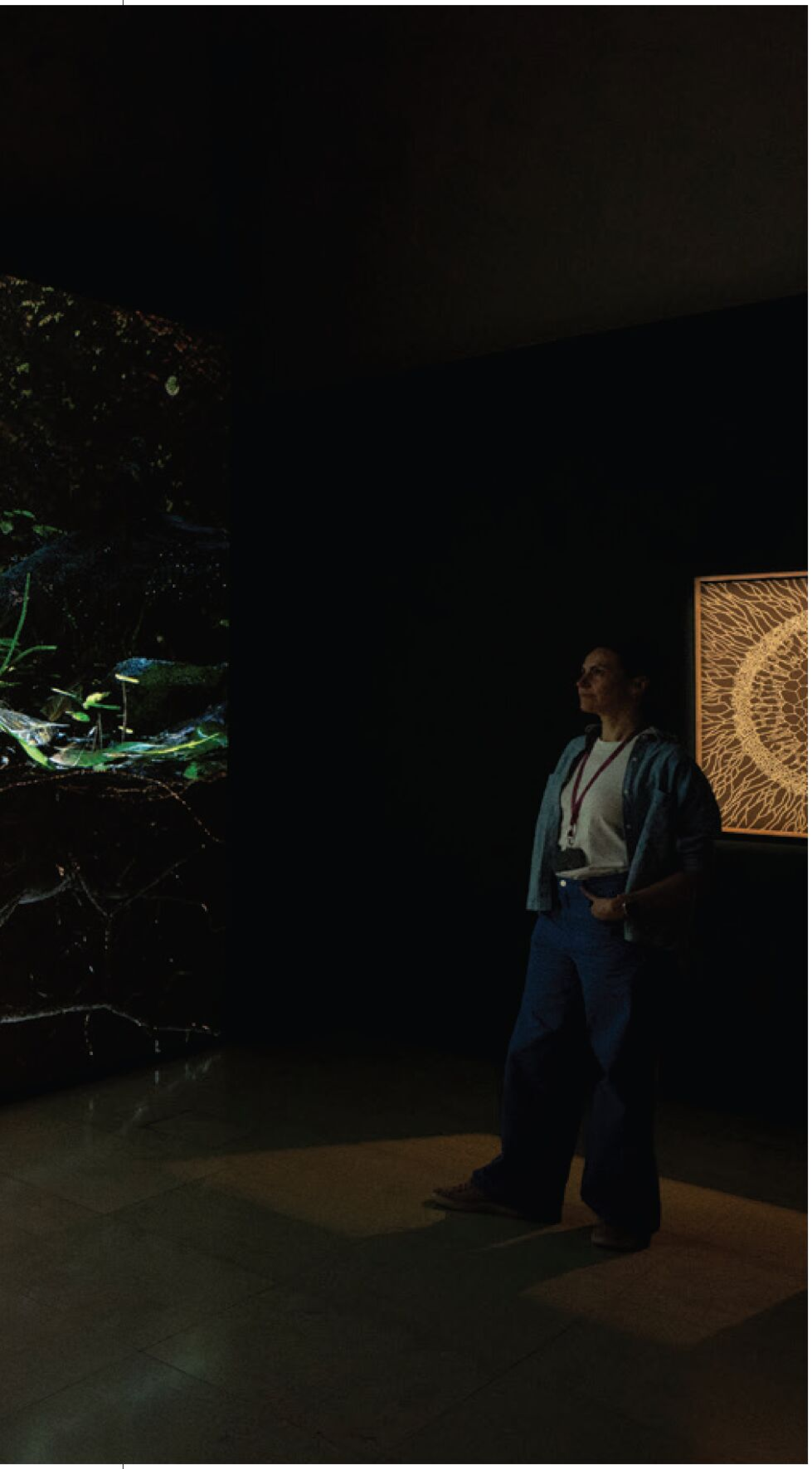


OPENING SPREAD: The poster for the *Taste of Tomorrow* exhibition **ABOVE:** Digital projection *Fly Agaric I* by art collective Marshmallow Laser Feast at *SOIL: The World at Our Feet* **RIGHT:** Beanless coffee from Morrow

Our soils have been degraded by decades of industrialised farming, replete with chemical fertilisers, pesticides and insecticides that make them less resistant to droughts and flooding. "So many of our soils are not dead but have gone dormant. We need to bring life back into our soils, so they become resilient, able to grow nutrient-dense food for human health," they explain. Healthy soils can also sequester carbon from the atmosphere and pump it back down into the soil – a win-win all round.

Skye Gyngell, chef proprietor of Spring at Somerset House, is also a firm advocate for regenerative farming. "Conventional farming methods deplete the soil, meaning the food we eat – even when we think we're eating well – contains fewer nutrients than it should. Regenerative farming, which avoids fertilisers and pesticides, is essential for restoring soil health and reversing the effects of desertification," she explains.

PREVIOUS PAGE **ANDRE KONG STUDIO**



IMAGES SANDRA CIAMPONE; COURTESY OF MORROW

THE STATS

The global food system is responsible for:

33%
OF GLOBAL GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

40%
OF ALL FOOD WASTE EACH YEAR

44%
OF ALL HABITABLE LAND USE

70%
OF FRESHWATER USE

78%
OF WATERWAY POLLUTION

SOURCE:
THE MILLS FABRICA
THE UK NATIONAL FOOD STRATEGY – THE PLAN, FAO,
UN FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ASSOCIATION, WWF

To put this into practice, Skye developed a three-course menu with The Land Gardeners for a special dining experience in early February, featuring organic, biodynamic produce from her 154-hectare Heckfield Home Farm.

COMMODITY TRADING

Over in King's Cross, sustainable incubator The Mills Fabrica looked beyond soil to the innovative practices at play. *Taste of Tomorrow: What will the world be eating in 2050?* showcased 12 early stage and scale-up businesses revolutionising the food and farming sectors, safeguarding our ecosystems while also feeding future generations. Free to the public until 31 July, the exhibition at Fabrica X was a masterclass in democratising information, making highly scientific terminology and cutting-edge techniques accessible to the masses through visual aids, posters and immersive activities – designed to appeal to the B2B supplier as much as to a ten-year-old child. (Ed's note: the latest installation, *Of The Oak*, is currently open at Kew Gardens until 28 September). There's also a café serving pastries made from flour farmed using regenerative practices, while a market stall sells products from sustainable brands.

In the space of one morning, I learnt about heat-resistant tomatoes, climate-resilient sugarcane, and methane-reducing seaweed feed supplement for cattle (under the catchy heading "Make burps better"). It's also here that I discovered beanless coffee, a phenomenon addressing the environmental and ethical impacts of one of the most consumed beverages in the world. Over 100,000 hectares of forest are lost to coffee farming on an annual basis, and climate change is threatening to erase half of coffee-growing land by 2050. And yet demand is set to triple by 2050 – hence the rising price of your morning cuppa.

Various companies are hoping to save the day (and your cash) with a sustainable alternative, replacing coffee beans with upcycled and superfood ingredients that are fermented, roasted and ground before being brewed.

Morrow is one such example, its 'coffee' crafted from ingredients including discarded fruit pips, chicory roots, green lentils and sunflower seeds – with the process emitting 80% fewer CO2 emissions than conventional coffee. For those that fear withdrawal symptoms, there's also the option to dip your toes in with the hybrid blend – combining 13% coffee with 87% of this next-gen product.

Morrow isn't the only player in the field. Singaporean-based Prefer transforms bread, soy and barley into coffee, while Seattle-based start-up Atomo Coffee combines Arabica coffee with its blend of date seeds, ramon seeds and green banana. You won't yet see the majority of these brands on your supermarket shelf, however they have teamed up with cafés, bars and restaurants to serve their coffee in everything from lattes to tiramisu and ice cream. The MO Bar, for instance, jazzes up an espresso martini with Prefer's 'coffee', while Atomo Coffee recently went on sale in iced oat latte form at Hagen's espresso bar in London's North Audley Street.

Another popular commodity with a high carbon footprint is chocolate, with cocoa farming driving deforestation

→

ABOVE: Nukoko's cocoa-free beans **BELOW:** Chef Oliver Truesdale-Jutras worked with Synthesis Partners for Menu 2034

IMAGE **COURTESY OF NUKOKO; JACE**

'Over the past 50 years, foods have lost up to half their nutritional density'

→

while also being associated with human rights abuses. French-based company Green Spot Technologies' range Ferment'Up leverages zero-waste fermentation technology to transform peels, grains and husks into protein-packed powders that substitute the likes of cocoa in baked goods. By 2030, the company aims to save 55.9 billion litres of water, as well as prevent 520,000 tonnes of waste and 730,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions.

UK-based climate tech company Nukoko is also developing a cocoa-free chocolate made from fava beans, with plans to use domestic beans in overseas regions to ensure the product is sustainable and scalable.

PROTEIN POWER

As well as securing the future of commodities like coffee and chocolate, fermentation is also being used to boost the quality of existing food. Over the past 50 years, foods have lost up to half their nutritional density, with consumers turning to supplements to balance otherwise deficient diets. Biotech companies, however, are now creating protein from untapped resources such as natural microorganisms.

Finnish food tech company Solar Foods, for instance, has created a protein literally from thin air. Solein is a golden yellow powder crafted from natural single-cell organisms, grown in a fermentation process using air and electricity – thereby converting CO2 to protein. It can be produced anywhere in the world, contains all the nine essential amino acids required by the human body, and has been tested in foods of different tastes and textures – from gelato and ravioli to bao buns.

Solein received novel food regulatory approval in Singapore in 2022, and last year obtained the GRAS (Generally Recognised as Safe) status in the US – enabling commercial activities in this market. So far, it has only been produced in small quantities, but the company opened a commercial-scale factory in Finland last year and has also filed for approval in Europe.

HUNGRY FOR INFORMATION

Creative data consultancy Synthesis Partners is also driving the conversation, using data to help the likes of PepsiCo, Mondelēz, Nestlé, Mars, and Diageo prepare for the challenges ahead.

"We live in a world inundated with data, yet its sheer scale and presentation often render it impenetrable," explains Lee Fordham, the company's founder. "Today, computational power and AI can process data and analyse billions of connections – far more than we could ever comprehend. We access and understand the interconnectedness of factors such as climate data, crop yields, and the nutritional density of ingredients, government regulations and healthcare challenges," he explains.

Its research paper Menu 2034 examined data from the past 25 years to model 100,000 simulations of the world in 2034, aimed at understanding how climate change and population growth will reshape our diets.

To make such information palatable, Synthesis worked with chef Oliver Truesdale-Jutras to "translate data insights into dishes". For instance, the chef served up high-protein jellyfish noodles in a Korean japchae-inspired dish to highlight the rise in jellyfish blooms, owing to ocean warming and overfishing.

Synthesis also partnered with Kita Food Festival earlier this year to host the Future of Food series in Singapore, teaming up with chefs, farmers and scientists for seminars, discussions and dinners open to the public.

SEEDS OF CHANGE

If this all sounds a little too high-tech, then there's plenty we can do to safeguard our future by battling food waste and diversifying our diets. "We can't afford to continue in this paradox of food waste: in our world of overproduction and overconsumption, 33% of the world's annual food production is lost or thrown away every year," says chef and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for biodiversity, Mauro Colagreco.

Mauro's three Michelin-starred restaurant Mirazur in the French town of Menton focuses on 'circular

WEIRD & WONDERFUL

REPURPOSED RAIN

Creative studio Bompas and Parr predicts that London's eateries will one day serve jellies made from distilled rainwater sourced from across the city, fragranced with hydroponically grown herbs.

FATTY BUT FAIR

Australian cultured meat company Vow has launched 'Forged Gras', a lab-grown alternative to the ethically dubious foie gras delicacy. Crafted from cultured Japanese quail cells, it promises a fatty liver flavour profile and texture – without any animal intervention.

A SPOONFUL OF ELECTRICITY

This year's CES saw the debut of Kirin's Electric Salt Spoon, which uses a mild electrical current to enhance the salty and umami taste of low-sodium foods. The spoon went on sale with limited runs in Japan last year and plans to reach a million users by 2029.

IMAGES EDIBLE SCIENCE: KEW'S KITCHEN GARDEN (C) RBG KEW; LIM EU-JIN MARCUS / MARCUSL PHOTOGRAPHY

MAIN: Edible Science, Kew's Kitchen Garden
INSET: A Reclaimed Sling 2.0 cocktail at MO Bar, Singapore

gastronomy' – using produce from the kitchen gardens, cultivated with permaculture and biodynamic methods. "We want to make everyone aware that by choosing what we eat, we are choosing the world we want to live in," he says. The menu at his Michelin-starred restaurant at Raffles London at The OWO, meanwhile, features 70 varieties of vegetables and fruit produced in Britain.

Acclaimed restaurants such as St JOHN in London and Lord's in New York are also fighting waste by promoting nose-to-tail cooking, which advocates for the use of every edible part of the animal. Menus feature the likes of roast bone marrow, chicken and ox tongue pie and crispy pig's head.

Hotels are also doing their bit, with groups such as Accor, Marriott, Iberostar and IHG Hotels & Resorts partnering with Winnow Solutions at selected properties to save food waste. The Winnow Vision AI technology uses intelligent cameras, smart scales and meters to analyse ingredients used during food preparation, assessing which food items are wasted the most and in what quantities.

Back home, you can also make a difference. It's time to zhuzh your stalks, peels and rinds into sauces or soups, trade ultra-processed foods for organic, seasonal produce and make a beeline for the yellow sticker discounted products in supermarkets, which are nearing best-before dates. "We need to eat as much of a plant as possible – throwing away the outer leaves of a cabbage is a crime," says Hélèna Dove, head kitchen gardener at The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

More than half of the world's population also rely on just three crops for nutritional needs – wheat, rice and corn. Kew Gardens experiments with unusual crops in its Edible Science kitchen garden, hoping to find future viable alternatives for staple crops. Dove suggests that our winter roast plates might feature crops such as the mustardy mashua or lemony oca plants in the future – also helping boost our vocabulary.

Synthesis Partners' Lee Fordham, meanwhile, suggests the consumption of insects and seaweed: "Insects have a biomass of approximately 200 million tonnes – more than double that of all livestock... Similarly, seaweed contributes over 35 million tonnes of cultivated biomass annually, captures carbon, restores marine ecosystems and serves as a versatile, nutrient-rich food source."

While you digest all that, you'll find me back at the MO Bar practising what I preach with a Reclaimed Sling 2.0. Mixologists have used high-tech machinery to extract the flavours of the colourful gin-based original and created a crystal-clear version, reminiscent of a martini. To reduce waste, the by-product from the process has even been upcycled into a rather stylish bright red lollipop garnish. Cheers to the future! **BT**

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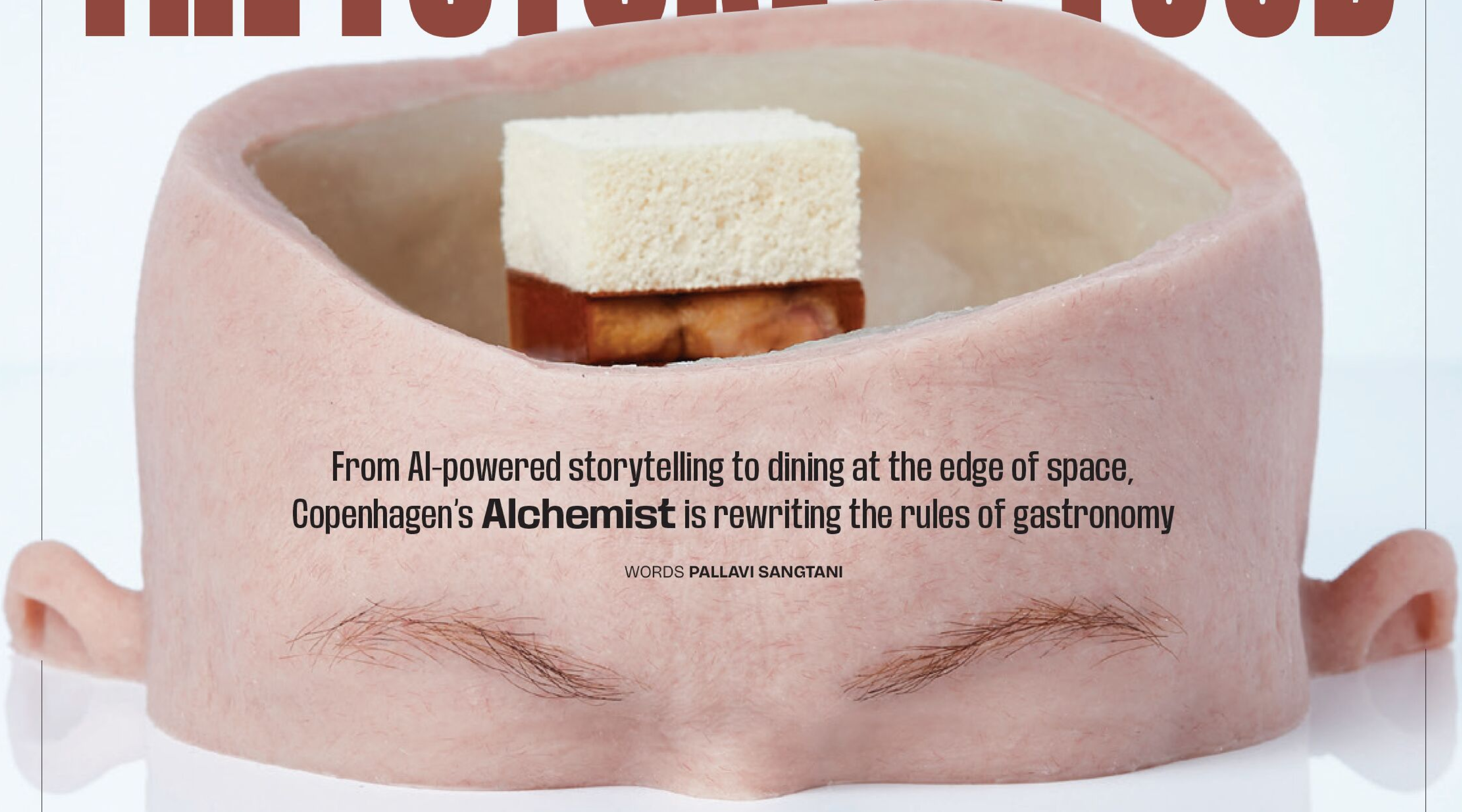
BEYOND THE PLATE
THE FUTURE OF FOOD



From AI-powered storytelling to dining at the edge of space, Copenhagen's **Alchemist** is rewriting the rules of gastronomy

WORDS **PALLAVI SANGTANI**

There are restaurants that serve food. And then there is Alchemist.

Hidden in a former Copenhagen shipyard behind a discreet bronze door, Alchemist is one of the hardest reservations to get in the world. Since opening in 2019, nearly a million hopeful diners have joined the waitlist for just 40 seats a night, with as many as 30,000 people competing each time its bookings open for a two-month window. Those who succeed in securing a place embark on an immersive six-hour journey of fifty impressions that blur the boundaries between gastronomy, theatre, technology, and social commentary.

ABOVE "Food for thought", a concept served at Alchemist consisting of lamb brains served with a cherry-walnut sauce

ENTERING A DIFFERENT WORLD

Chef Rasmus Munk calls his philosophy Holistic Cuisine, where food is not the subject but the medium. He does not serve courses but stages confrontations. Each impression is designed to provoke, amuse, or disturb. *Food For Thought* arrives in a silicone mould shaped like a head, filled with lamb brains to highlight wasted parts of animals. An ice cream dessert made with pig's blood, layered eight times, illustrates how one donation of blood can save up to eight lives. In a course or 'impression' called *1984*, an Orwellian eye stares back as diners scoop out caviar, a reminder that surveillance never sleeps. Global influences also appear, from a dosa-inspired impression to a dish of butterflies that points towards alternative protein sources of the future.

The journey moves through several rooms, each with its own role. It begins at a lounge facing the venue's glass-walled lab, where the first impressions are served. Most of the evening takes place in its dome hall with its shifting projections. Towards the end of the experience, guests step into an art installation space that invites interaction. The night ends upstairs in a quieter lounge, where the pace slows down and conversations carry on.

On the surface it looks like a spectacle. Yet beneath the smoke, soundscapes, and shifting light is an orchestration of obsession, precision, and deep purpose. Every element, from the dome ceiling with its fluid projections to the art room with edible paint, is part of a larger message. There are no clocks, and no windows – only the intriguing sensation of stepping into a dream you cannot quite shake.

WHEN TECHNOLOGY TAKES THE LEAD

Alchemist runs more like a tech company than a traditional kitchen. Its teams collaborate on digital Trello boards to track ideas and manage front of house. Research and development takes place in Spora, the restaurant's non-profit lab where chefs, scientists, designers, and artists experiment together.

IMAGES CLAES BECH POULSEN

Here, projects range from creating food waste solutions to producing chocolate from spent barley. Artificial intelligence has also found its place in the dining room. In one experiment, tiny cameras hidden in servers' buttons captured portraits of guests, which were processed through an AI system to create surreal videos to be projected back at diners as the experience began. The effect was powerful, forcing diners to face the uneasy overlap between privacy, surveillance, and identity in the digital age. But at Alchemist, technology is never a gimmick. It is a language of visuals, textures, flavours, and even silence.

FROM SPACE BREAD TO SPACE TRAVEL

Spora's experiments reach far beyond Earth. In collaboration with NASA, Munk's team has developed "space bread" designed to be eaten in zero gravity. At Alchemist, the same bread arrives crowned with caviar, a reminder that innovation can be both functional and indulgent.

In 2027, Munk's vision will lift off as he partners with SpaceVIP and Space Perspective to stage the first stratospheric dining experience aboard Spaceship Neptune, a carbon-neutral craft carried by a SpaceBalloon to 100,000 feet. Guests will dine at the edge of space on a menu created for microgravity, with ticket proceeds supporting the Space Prize Foundation, which advances gender equity in science and technology. The project draws on Munk's childhood memory of gazing at Earth's projection in a planetarium. His ambition is to trigger the Overview Effect: the profound shift astronauts describe when confronted with our fragile planet suspended in darkness. Here, dining becomes a visionary act, looking forward to new frontiers while reminding us of our shared responsibility for the future.

ABOVE Space Bread

TOP Dome Surveillance

BELOW Rasmus Munk's Wall of Taste

SUSTAINABILITY IN FOCUS

While Alchemist dazzles with theatre, Spora ensures it remains grounded in real-world impact. It is a global, multidisciplinary food research centre and network where deliciousness leads technology rather than following it. The aim is simple but ambitious: to develop foods that people crave, can access, and are sustainable for the planet. Spora funds research addressing critical global food system challenges, where projects range from upcycling by-products into indulgent alternatives, such as chocolate without cocoa, or unlocking the potential of protein-rich rapeseed and fish by-products.

Research and experimentation are central to the experience at Alchemist. Impressions draw directly on Spora's work in waste reduction and alternative proteins, with indulgence funding innovation. Sustainability is not a separate narrative here. It is woven seamlessly into the story told through every impression, where technology, science, gastronomy, and ethical consideration meet without compromise.

LUXURY THAT ARGUES BACK

To call a visit to Alchemist a meal is to understate it. It is closer to an edible gallery, where every impression is an individual journey. The *Ocean Waste* dish arrives tangled in plastic, opening diners to the reality of marine pollution before they taste it. Another course presents a chicken served inside a metal cage, making the ethics of meat impossible to ignore.

Here, luxury is not comfort – it is challenge. Alchemist is not for everyone, nor is it meant to be universally liked. It insists that you think, confront, and reflect, often in ways that linger long after the final bite. Some impressions charm, others disturb, but all are designed to spark conversation and leave an imprint. And yet, for all its theatre, flavour is never sacrificed. The *Perfect Omelette* bursts with richness and nostalgia even as it showcases advanced culinary science. However much you question, you leave with the taste of extraordinary food etched in memory.

DINING AS A GLIMPSE OF TOMORROW

In a world where most restaurants strive to placate, Alchemist chooses to unsettle. Where others polish tradition, it asks what dining should, and can be. And where many serve food, Alchemist serves questions. It offers something no other restaurant can: a vision of dining that blends art, technology and science into an experience that is as unforgettable as it is unparalleled. Dining here is a reminder that food is not just sustenance; not just fine dining, nor even just pleasure. It can be provocation, reflection and transformation. It is a vision of how we might live, eat, and imagine the future. **BT**

IMAGES **DANIEL JENSEN; SØREN GAMMELMARK**

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Up to Par

A country previously not known for golf, Italy is now officially on the radar of Middle Easterners – and a growing number of Arabs are turning to the country for their golfing trips

WORDS **ALLYSON PORTEE**

ABOVE A rendering of the upcoming Six Senses Resort & Branded Residences, with Antognolla Castle in the foreground

OPPOSITE PAGE The 16th hole at Antognolla golf course

IMAGE **WOODS BAGOT**

Golf is a sport that has been found in the Middle East since the mid 20th century. Initially, it was seen as an elite sport – one for expats. But things have been changing in the regional psyche in recent years. As golf clubs have sprung up from the Levant to the Arabian Gulf, a growing number of Arabs are making it part of their leisure repertoire, both within the region and beyond. This is in part due to the UAE investing US$40 billion into Italy's tourism sector, which directly impacts its golf offering. One course that is taking advantage of this appeal is Antognolla Golf Course in Perugia, Italy – an unspoiled part of Italy that's booming with new luxury properties.

Antognolla, a Robert Trent Jones, Jr.-conceived course is set in the Umbrian hills with a 12th-century castle overlooking its well-manicured 18 holes, with a nearby vineyard for their wine and olive trees for their bottled oil. The course, though challenging, has been ranked the number one golf course in Italy by the *Golfer's Choice* community, and it is also home to an upcoming Six Senses Resort & Branded Residences. "As golf gains momentum across the Arabian Gulf, enthusiastic new players naturally evolve into golf tourists, and travellers want to play on courses renowned for their design and landscape," Federico Ricci, CEO of Antognolla tells me. "As Arab golfers develop their skills, supported by growing infrastructure at home, they become more likely to seek 'must-play' courses abroad, combining golf with cultural immersion and exclusivity," Ricci explains.

A SPORTING MOVEMENT WITH INCREASING TOURISM IMPACT

"Golf is no longer just an expat sport. Emiratis are increasingly taking lessons, joining golf clubs, and participating in tournaments," says Daniel Wright, head of tourism for 54 in Abu Dhabi. "The Emirates Golf Federation Programs like the UAE's Schools Golf Initiative aim to introduce youth to the sport and open doors for Emiratis of all ages to participate. The trend is reflected at home and overseas. There are over 20 clubs under the Emirates Golf Federation umbrella now, while the number of UAE golfers visiting golfing destinations in the likes of Italy, Scotland, Spain, and Portugal are significantly on the rise. Corporate golf tourism is also expected to dominate the GCC market by the end of 2025, with tailored packages for high-end clients."

Wright points out that there are several reasons why golf has become attractive to travellers from the Middle East, including the way luxury destinations have leveraged culture, stunning locations, and the appeal of this refinement to the taste of high-net-worth individuals. The cooler climates are

another factor, particularly during the heat of the Middle East's summer season. At the 2025 Arabian Travel Market in Dubai, the Italian National Tourist Board (ENIT) further drove this home through its Italy Golf & More campaign. "Italy's rich heritage, scenic landscapes, and growing golf infrastructure make it a natural fit for Gulf investors seeking premium, diversified tourism assets," says Wright.

As Italy attracts more visitors from the GCC, Antognolla is preparing. "Visitors from the Middle East represent an increasingly important segment for Italy and naturally for destinations like Antognolla," says Ricci. "According to ENIT, Italy welcomed 65 million international tourists in 2024, and arrivals from the Middle East are projected to reach almost 965,000 in 2025 (21% more than 2024)," he adds.

Antognolla's director of Golf, César Burguière is hopeful that the influx of GCC visitors will have an increasingly positive impact. "Golf has not historically been the most prominent sport among Arab travellers, but interest is rising quickly as outstanding courses are being developed across the Arabian Gulf, particularly in the UAE. Italy is already a top destination for Middle Eastern visitors – the UAE is our strongest market in the region, and forecasts show more than 310,000 travellers from the UAE will visit Italy in 2025, a growth of over 16%. With golf gaining such momentum at home, it's only natural that many of these visitors will want to experience Italy's renowned courses," he says.

"We are preparing for this shift. We fully expect to see an influx of golfers from the Middle East, and we are ready to welcome them with world-class facilities and an environment that highlights the beauty of Italian golf," Burguière continues.

"The rise of golf interest in the Gulf, paired with global growth in golf tourism and Arab travellers' preference for exclusive, experience-rich destinations, strongly indicates that [their] interest in golf will substantially impact luxury golf tourism in Italy. Antognolla is exceptionally well-positioned to benefit from this emerging trend," says Antognolla's CEO.

A SOFT POWER PLAYER

In 2009, American diplomat Richard Hass wrote an article for *Newsweek* on what golf can teach about geopolitics, suggesting that golf can even be seen as a tool for soft power diplomacy. Wright, too, sees golf as paramount in bridging relations between the Arab world and other regions. "Golf is increasingly seen as a tool of soft power," Wright said, explaining that as countries like the UAE host major tournaments and invest in international golf assets, for instance, there is an opportunity to be positioned as a leader not only in sports tourism and hospitality, but also one with a stronger global influence and higher economic standing. "The GCC's golf tourism market is expected to grow from US$2.2 billion in 2025 to US$4.1 billion by 2035. With Italy's rising profile in the UAE, it is increasingly seen as a premium golf destination, with rising international green fee bookings and strategic marketing targeting Gulf travellers at B2C and B2B tourism trade fairs," Wright adds.

Antognolla has welcomed Middle East visitors, following the UAE's recent commitment of US$40 billion to invest in Italy, which was announced earlier this year. "Investment obviously spans a number of sectors, but golf is particularly benefiting because the value proposition of luxury tourism developments increases when golf courses are nearby. The whole flow of capital has helped cultural and mobility factors; it's now very easy for Emiratis to travel to Italy for golf and leisure. We're also seeing this manifest itself in strategic partnerships which support the wider tourism industry with the UAE and Italy collaborating proactively across tourism, culture, and heritage promotion," says Wright.

Golf is no stranger to the Middle East. One of Egypt and the Arab world's best golfers was Hassan Hassanein, known as 'Doc.' He started off as a caddie at the Helipolis Golf Course, and by 1949 he won the Italian Open at Villa d'Este and the French Open in St. Cloud in 1951. Hassanein beat Britain's Max Faulkner, Australia's Norman Von Nida, and won Egypt's Open four times in row from 1949-1952. Succumbing to an early death, Henry Longhurst wrote in the UK *Sunday Times* that Hassanein was 'the best Oriental golfer.'

In Saudi Arabia, too, the sport's presence has been rooted at the Rolling Hills Golf Club in Dharan City since 1949. "In Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030 emphasises tourism diversification, with a recent announcement of US$100 million worth of investment to build luxury golf resorts with a long-term vision of up to 100 courses. The global golf tourism market is expanding rapidly, and golf tourism isn't just about sport, it's a luxury lifestyle and experiential travel segment, driven by affluent travellers seeking immersive experiences," Ricci says.

Ricci attributes growth and interest of the Middle East market to high-net-worth Arab travellers who want unique destinations that are exclusive, prestigious, and authentic. Pointing to statistics for the 2025 Nexi Report, he notes that "Arab travellers are among the highest spenders worldwide: Saudis average €913 per transaction, [and] Emiratis €822, which are both well above the international average of €411."

Burguière, meanwhile, is paying close attention to the needs of all guests, including players from the Arab world. "Their expectations often set the tone for global high-end travel," he says. "It is worth noting that Dubai's golf courses were ranked among the world's Top 50 in 2023, celebrated for their innovative designs that harmonise with the region's desert landscapes. That philosophy deeply resonates with us: at Antognolla, we are equally committed to integrating the beauty of our natural environment with sustainable practises in golf and hospitality."

"Middle Eastern visitors do more than simply enjoy our estate – they provide valuable perspective and inspiration, helping us refine the Antognolla experience in ways that speak to both tradition and innovation," says Burguière. **BT**

SAVE THE DATE

One of the most highly-anticipated golfing events in the Middle East is the DP World Tour Championship. This golf tournament is the climax of the Race to Dubai, contested annually on Jumeirah Golf Estates' Greg Norman-designed Earth course. Its next edition will return from 13-16 November 2025.

IMAGES ANTOGNOLLA GOLF COURSE; ANDREW REDINGTON/GETTY IMAGES

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RESTAURANT REVIEW
KIGO +
TATEL

Review

Putting business travel to the test

FLIGHT REVIEW

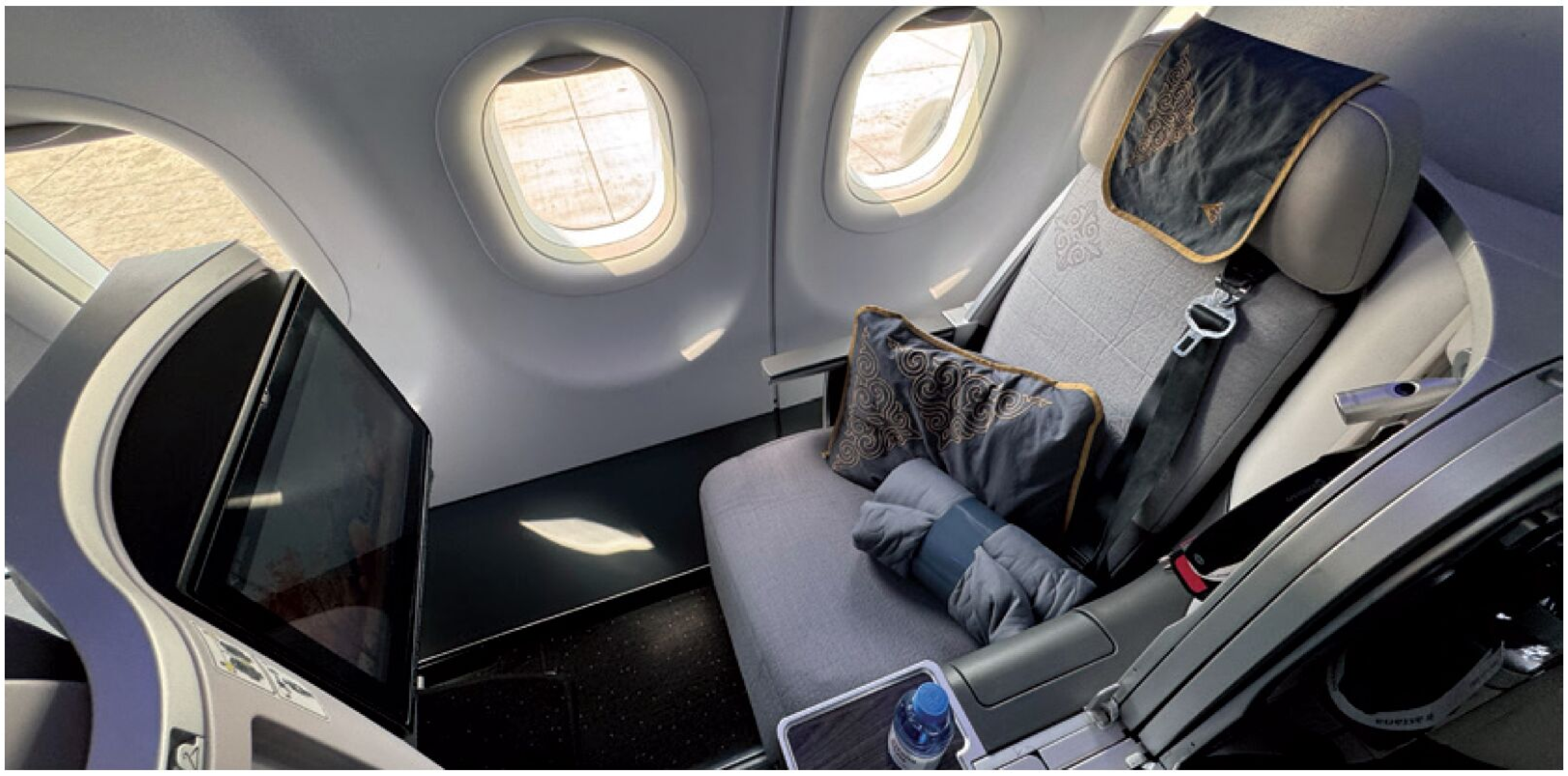
Air Astana Airbus A321Neo LR Business Class Dubai-Almaty

Kazakhstan's award-winning flag carrier proves that it's not just a top way to travel to and from the country, it's a premium experience at an accessible price

IMAGE YI-HWA HANNA

FLIGHT Review

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA



Background

Air Astana first launched direct flights between Dubai and Almaty in 2002. After ceasing in 2010, they relaunched in September 2014, and currently operate 11 flights a week on this route. The airline took delivery of its first Airbus A320neo in 2016, and it, along with the Airbus A320neo LR and the Airbus A320, are all used on this route. My flight - departing on a Thursday at 13:55 - was operated on the Airbus A321neo LR (and the return, on a Sunday at 09:15, on an Airbus A321 Neo).

Boarding

Departing from DXB Terminal 1, after a change of gate (to the one next door) shortly before the flight, the gates opened on time, with business passengers first. Flight boarding began right on time, although there was only one entry on the jet bridge (the second entrance was closed with a manual sign indicating so). The staff explained that on flights with no first class, such as this one, all passengers enter through the same point, with economy passing by business on the way. From the UAE, business passengers have access to the T1 Marhaba lounge, while on the return, you can enjoy the Shanyraq: Air Astana's 24-hour business class lounge.

The seat

This aircraft follows a 1:1 and 2:2 configuration, with 16 business class seats in total – but one of the most special factors is the fact that the two 1:1 rows have a 'throne seat' on either side of the aisle. Single seats with direct aisle access and a significantly larger table surface to work from, these are a dream for business travellers (barring the lack of wifi). There are only four 'throne seats' and these come with an extra charge. Even in the 2:2 rows, however, the seats are spacious and comfortable, each with a private reading light, ample storage space, and a lie-flat bed with a very smooth and easy control system. The blanket is large and cozy, the pillow is large and soft, and both are decorated with classic Kazakh designs. The 16-inch HD touchscreens are wonderfully clear and bright, with a good variety of regional and international films, TV shows, and music available. Sound is equally crisp, experienced through incredibly comfortable noise-cancelling headphones.

The flight

After a welcome drink – if you get the chance, Air Astana's cherry juice and fresh lemonade are fan favourites – the flight departed right on time. The safety video sets the tone: a clever, playful take showcasing Kazakhstan's unique culture and stunning natural beauty amidst the important information, it's a clear sign that this is an airline with a difference. In-flight, the friendly staff were always available with refreshments, and mealtime was a delight starting with fresh breads, and a variety of cheeses, honey, and nuts, alongside the appetiser. For mains, you can choose an international or a Kazakh dish, from braised beef neck to, on some flights, horse meat. This year, Air Astana has partnered with Auyl – a World's 50 Best Discovery restaurant in Almaty – for business class meals. Cabin temperature was comfortable, and the air was never dry. From Dubai, a window seat on the starboard side will grant you the bonus of a spectacular view over the Hindu Kush and Tien Shan mountains, and with a 19:10 landing, you'll even catch the sunset.

Arrival

Landing was smooth, on time, and I was out to find my ride within 30 minutes. **BT**

GOOD-TO-KNOW

The Airbus A320 family has the lowest fuel burn, levels of emissions, and noise footprint of its class, giving sustainability-minded passengers extra peace of mind.

VERDICT

From its top service to its well-cared-for aircraft and fair prices, Air Astana is truly an underrated gem. This isn't just a flight from A to B, it's a hospitality experience in the sky.

BEST FOR

Excellent value for money in an exceptional business class experience - where warm Kazakh hospitality begins before you land.

FLIGHT DURATION
4 hours 15 minutes

SEAT PITCH
44in-45in/112cm-114cm

SEAT WIDTH
21.5in/55cm

BED LENGTH
78in/198.12cm

CONFIGURATION
1:1 and 2:2

PRICE
Online rates for a direct, return business class trip in October start from AED 7,585 (incl. taxes and fees)

BAGGAGE ALLOWANCE
Checked: 2 pc/32kg each;
Carry-on: 2 pc/8kg each

CONTACT
airastana.com

IMAGES YI-HWA HANNA

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

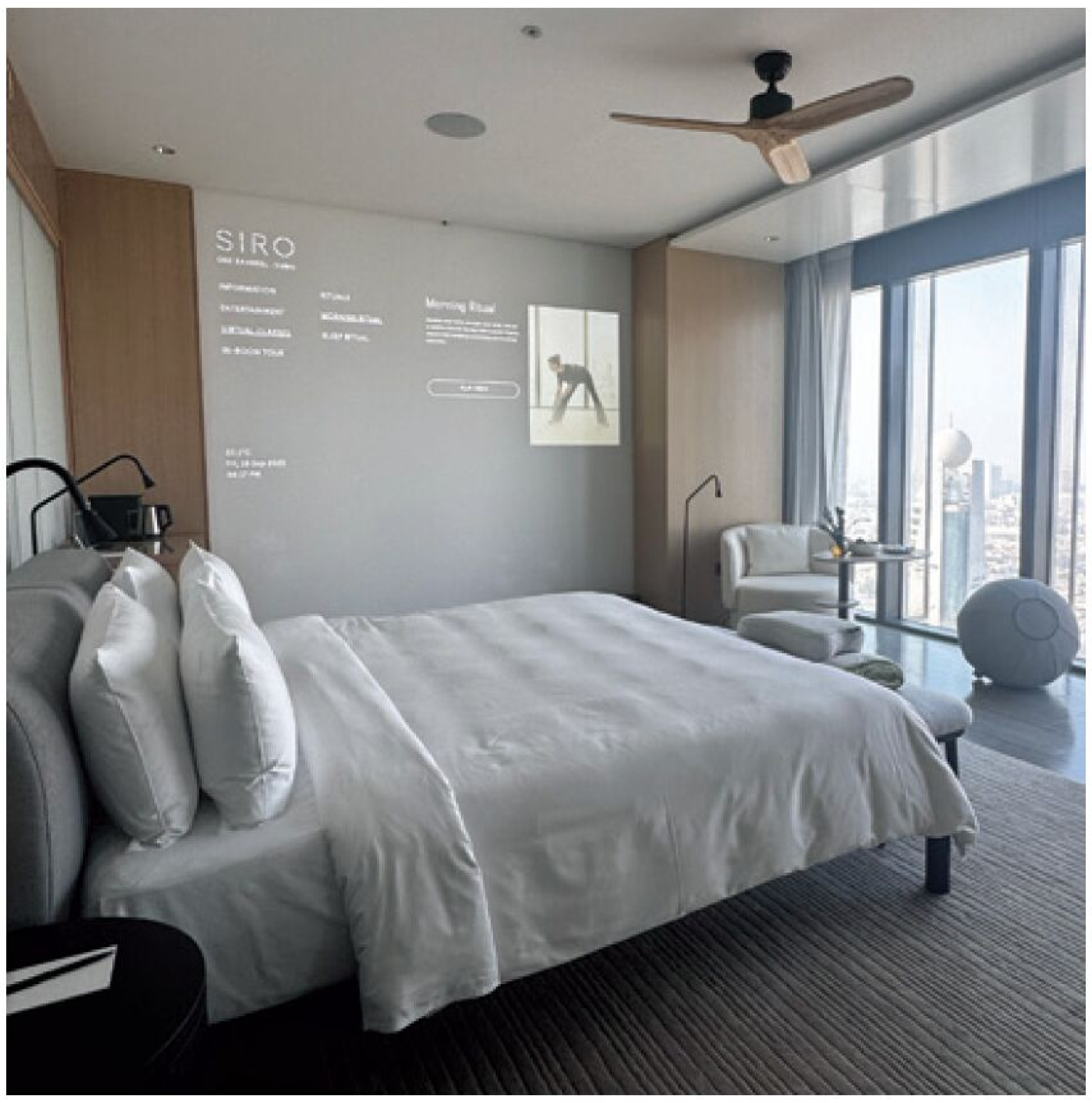
SIRO One Za'abeel

The UAE's first fitness hotel is a marvel of biohacking and life-optimising style

What's it like?
In 2025, wellness retreats aren't just big business – they're also increasingly commonplace. Yet most such retreats tend to focus on the more holistic side of well-being, incorporating fitness as an afterthought. Enter SIRO One Za'abeel: Dubai's first fitness- and recovery-focused hotel. Owned by Kerzner International, it's also presented as a business hotel - and with biohacking, fitness, and recovery now being firm priorities of many of the world's most successful HNWIs, it makes sense that this futuristic, healthwise property is close to the prime business districts of Dubai International Financial Centre and the Dubai World Trade Centre, steps away from the Museum of the Future. It's sleek yet never clinical: here, luxury means feeling full of vigour, and being intentional about getting quality rest, so you can function as the best version of yourself. If you're not already an athlete, it could be easy to think this would be an intimidating environment – but from the warm welcome at reception, to the sincerity of the in-house Recovery Lab staff, this is a place that's about supporting your individual goals.

GOOD-TO-KNOW

To enter the hotel, drive up to SIRO's dedicated valet point (at Entrance 4). From there, you can take a lift up to the 30th floor, where you'll find the hotel's primary welcome lobby. You can also enter via One&Only One Za'abeel (which has a separate designated valet point, at Entrance 1), then switching lifts at the 25th floor, to the 30th.



IMAGES **SIRO ONE ZA'ABEEL; YI-HWA HANNA**

Rooms
While much of the rest of the hotel is a flurry of constant activity, the rooms – and the hallways between them – are dens of zen. The interiors are minimalistic yet warm thanks to the soothing, neutral colour scheme bolstered by warm wood accents, all drenched in sunlight through floor-to-ceiling windows. From the SIRO Plus to the Suites, the rooms are impressively spacious, to ensure there's ample room for you to stretch, do yoga or a mat workout (for which equipment is provided in-room), or use the Swedish Ladder or zero-gravity chair. In the Fitness and Recovery Suites, you'll also find a fully-equipped workout space including a treadmill and boxing bag, and a private treatment room and recovery bath, respectively. All but the Premium King (which has a regular TV) boast a projector-led wallscreen that can display virtual fitness classes. Every room features sleep-optimising technology, from thermoregulated mattresses to soundproofing and smart curtains, which, along with the room climate, can be controlled via an app. In your room, you'll also find healthy snacks and alternative milks.

VERDICT

The ultimate property for people who value an active lifestyle, and wish to enhance a business trip, or enjoy a staycation with a real health boost.

BEST FOR

Athletes, people who take their fitness seriously, and those who *want* to take their fitness more seriously - alongside science-backed recovery and rest.

DON'T MISS

The Triple Detox in the cutting-edge MLX i3Dome, and SANCTUM: a unique 50-minute 'cathartic movement' class.

PRICE
A weeknight stay in October starts from AED 1,352 for a SIRO Plus room, or AED 2,800 for a Fitness or Recovery Suite.

CONTACT
Zaa'beel Street, Dubai, UAE; +971 4 666 1717; sirohotels.com/dubai/one-zaabeel

Facilities
Every stay at SIRO One Za'abeel comes with unlimited access to a range of its group fitness and wellness sessions, from indoor cycling to sound healing, as well as a body composition analysis, and access to its Fitness and Recovery Labs. In the former, you'll find an epic gym with every piece of cardio, strength, and functional training equipment you could dream of on the 'fitness floor', up to 50 weekly classes from cycling to HIIT, Pilates, and boxing fitness – with a workout designed by Olympic boxer Ramla Ali – and highly-qualified personal trainers. After your workout, the Recovery Lab awaits with compression therapy, cryotherapy, vibroacoustic therapy, functional massages, and more – or you can kick back at the garden pool. Refuel with a build-your-own modular dining meal from menus that feature every detail of their macros, or a protein shake at The Refuel Bar. Need guidance? Book a session with the in-house nutritionist. At breakfast, you can enjoy a nourishing meal from Nette at Culinara, while for lunch or dinner, you can indulge at the chic Aelia and renowned StreetXO. **BT**

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

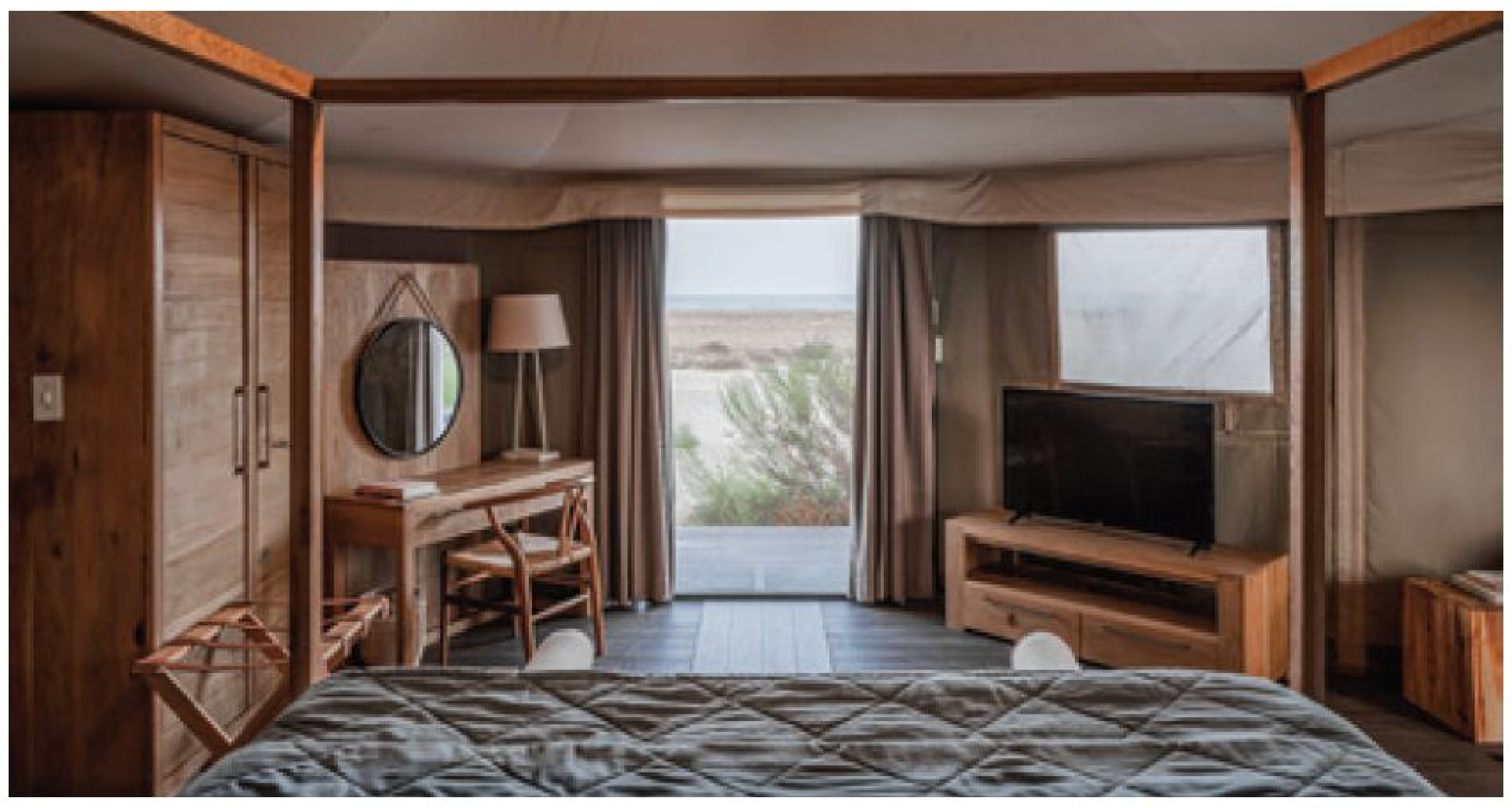
Kingfisher Retreat by Sharjah Collection

Slow down, connect with nature, and immerse yourself in Emirati culture at this rugged eco-retreat

What's it like?
Part of the Sharjah Collection – a group of unique retreats owned by Shurooq – this property first opened in December 2017. Since then, it has undergone a series of subtle changes with extensions and enhancements, and since its last phase of development in 2022, it now has 40 luxurious tent rooms, each with a private pool. The entire resort is dedicated to conservation and culture – it's a celebration of the nature that can be found off the east coast of this northern emirate. It's a considerable drive away from the UAE's buzzy centres of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, so close to Oman that if you take a wrong turn near the island, you could end up doing a U-turn at the border. Once you've found it, the resort itself – accessible via buggy pickup from its parking lot – is delightfully remote. This is a place where nature can thrive in its most undisturbed state. At Kingfisher Retreat, luxury means experiencing true serenity by getting away from the madding crowd, and grounding yourself as you appreciate the flora, fauna, and marine life treasures within the UAE's natural landscape.

Rooms
The tents come in one- to four-bedroom options with ocean or mountain views. Each one is spacious, with a comfortable living area, a private plunge pool, and a dresser that can double as a desk. This is glamping done right: the tents are luxurious and comfortable, with king-sized beds, highly effective air conditioning, free wifi, and coffee and tea facilities, plus a generous bathroom area with a bathtub as well as a shower. Outside, you'll find a large deck that can even host BBQs. In a sea view room, literally steps outside your door you'll find the beach, replete with crabs, visiting birds, and epic views of the sunrise and sunset. They're all spaced out enough to give you a real sense of privacy, further adding to the feeling of tranquility. You can access them on foot – the resort is small enough to walk around comfortably – or you can get there via buggy, driven by the friendly, and always available staff.

Facilities
Beyond the lobby – a grand welcome tent – you'll find a reception area, and the resort's restaurant, Al Qurm. It serves local as well as international cuisine, with a hearty breakfast buffet, and à la carte or set menu options for lunch and dinner. Room service is also available. The resort has a spa where you can enjoy massages, facials, and more, with separate tents for women and men – but the main draw here is the Khor Kalba Mangrove Centre. Located at the edge of the resort, the conservation area encompasses the oldest mangrove forest in the UAE. The centre is a stronghold of ecological knowledge, where kids and adults alike can learn about everyhing from local sea life to the area's topography and beyond. During cooler months, you can also go kayaking and paddleboarding. **BT**



GOOD-TO-KNOW

This area is home to the rare Arabian Collared Kingfisher that gives the resort its name. You can see one at the in-resort mangrove centre – along with other exotic birds, crabs in colourful shells, green turtles, a large variety of fish, and if you're lucky, maybe even a gazelle.

HOT TIP

Driving there from Dubai? Plan your route via Fujairah's Sheikh Khalifa Street, to experience the "musical road" that plays Beethoven's 9th symphony as you roll over it.

VERDICT

A nature retreat that truly honours its commitment to conservation and upholding Emirati culture, through a serene and luxurious setting.

BEST FOR

Nature and wildlife enthusiasts, people with an interest in learning more about biodiversity and the UAE's environmental treasures, and a tranquil escape from the city buzz.

DON'T MISS

If you like cycling, the hotel can provide bicycles with which to explore the area.

PRICE
A weekend stay in October starts from AED 1,399 a night (room only) for a One-Bedroom Mountain View Tent.

CONTACT
Corniche Road, Al Gurm, Kalba, Sharjah; +971 54 701 9375; sharjahcollection.ae/kingfisher-retreat

IMAGES KINGFISHER RETREAT BY SHARJAH COLLECTION

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

KIGO Dubai

A superlative new dining experience that blends immersive dining and authentic Japanese culture and cuisine in a singular, unforgettable concept

What's it like?
This new restaurant in Dubai's highly-regarded DIFC dining scene was created by Fundamental Hospitality and lauded chef Izu Ani. But this is no ordinary restaurant – this is an experience. Inside its intimate, reservations-only setting, you'll find 44 seats within delicate, minimalistic interiors that are designed to exude the serene spirit of "Wa" - a Japanese philosophy of harmony. This isn't just felt in the aesthetics, but also through its cleverly curated soundtrack, complete with chimes often used in sound healing. The goal of its intended energy is achieved the moment you step through its doors, down the beautiful rock-paved entrance: this is a zen palace in which the troubles of the world can melt away, and you can delve into a living storybook where an unforgettable tale is told through food. The restaurant offers two options: a sushi omakase tasting menu, where your meal will be based on the freshest catch for Sushi Head Chef Daihachiro Ebata's artistry to take flight; and an elegant kaiseki menu led by Head Chef Akinori 'Aki' Tanigawa. Both cost AED 2,500 pp.

Food and drink
To call chef Tanigawa's kaiseki menu a meal would be an insult: this is a *journey*. Inspired by the season during which you're dining, the menu will change every three months. Each of its nine courses is meant to reflect a different aspect of the season, combining unique ingredients flown in from Japan alongside exceptional techniques. The result is what can only be described as a poetic expression rather than a course, with each one as much of a delight for the eyes as it is for the tastebuds. The chef employs the use of texture masterfully, allowing the hand-picked ingredients – chosen to be demonstrated at their peak – to shine. This is not the kind of cuisine that shouts about how special it is: instead, it is a song that begins with a whisper, tinkles with each new layer, and builds to a crescendo, that blends its delicate, sharp, citrusy, sweet and savoury flavours and buttery, velvety, smooth, crunchy, and meaty textures in an exquisite symphony. The Nigiri is like no other Nigiri you've had before. The creative interpretations, like silken beltfish enveloped in a crispy and light tempura exterior, and juicy Kagoshima Wagyu in a unique Shiizakana style, are as delicious as they are beautiful; while dishes like a salmon and wild mushroom rice clay pot, peppered with warm, salty roe that bursts in the mouth, comfort you next to rich, layered miso soup. To finish, impossibly fresh premium Japanese fruit feels like a treasure, alongside a Mizugashi masterpiece perfectly accompanied by genuine, toasty Hoshino Matcha.

Service
The service at KIGO is the type that truly puts the finery in fine dining. Our server, Raju, was not simply a waiter but a guide, sharing deep knowledge of each dish in a manner befitting of the ceremonial aspect of a kaiseki experience here. The chef himself came out to present us with his work, while GM Mikio's sincere joy at witnessing our enjoyment was as soul-feeding as the rest of our evening here. **BT**

VERDICT

An outstanding new addition to the UAE's dining scene, that will stun lovers of Japanese cuisine while entrancing newcomers.

HOURS

Open from Wednesday to Monday, with two seatings. The first seating is at 6pm; the second seating at 9:30pm.

CONTACT

Four Seasons Hotel Dubai International Financial Centre; +971 4 270 7960; kigodubai.com

DRESS CODE

Smart elegant to formal.

GOOD TO KNOW

KIGO also has a private dining area that can seat up to 10 people at a time. If you have any allergies, these can be communicated to the staff when booking, so the chef can amend your kaiseki experience accordingly – which is done thoughtfully, with no sense of compromise or loss.

IMAGES KIGO DUBAI

WORDS
YI-HWA HANNA

TATEL Dubai

A star-backed pick that is as chic as it is grounded, great for a multitude of repeat occasions

What's it like?
The TATEL brand was first created in 2014, as a project initially co-founded by Abel Matutes Prats and Manuel Campos Guallar to celebrate Spanish culture and traditional cooking through a haute cuisine experience centered around gastronomic excellence. TATEL was then backed by some dazzling new partners: none other than football, tennis, and basketball legends Cristiano Ronaldo, Rafael Nadal and Pau Gasol. It now exists in six locations around the world – including Madrid (its first), Ibiza, Valencia, Marbella, Riyadh, and Dubai – the latter of which opened in summer 2024. But its star-studded founder list isn't its only claim to fame – the restaurant's website proudly proclaims that it was listed as one of the 25 restaurants in the world worth travelling for, in a 2019 survey conducted by Kayak and OpenTable. The Dubai venue is sleek and trendy, with dark wood panelling balanced by indoor greenery, rich jewel-toned decor and warm, ambient lighting that practically begs for you to relax and embrace your inner night owl - but always with an air of grace. There's a dining area with an open kitchen, private spaces for VIP events, an outdoor garden terrace, and a bar area with atmospheric seating for drinks and bites alike, plus cozy nooks that beg for quiet conversations over hours that linger. The music is vibey yet never ostentatious, making it equally great for a date night, after-work meetings, or catch-ups with friends.

GOOD-TO-KNOW

The restaurant has entertainment on Wednesdays to Saturdays, from live music and a DJ to dancers.

Food and drink
From even a first glance at the menu, it's clear that the dishes on offer here were not selected to tick a box with 'must-have' Spanish clichés that act as background noise to its impressive mixology list. Rather, while the beverages are indeed standouts worth coming for on their own, the food shines in its own right, and it would be a crying shame to miss out on it. You'll find Spanish classics like gazpacho and gambas al ajillo that begs to be mopped up with crusty bread, listed alongside creative takes like a fried tempura oyster with brava sauce, and fresh avocado and red shrimps brushed with a garlic dressing – a winning dish. It's tough to choose between the stellar seafood or meaty mains, but the short ribs – either glazed or slow-cooked with rice – are tender and flavourful. Leave room for dessert: the TATEL famous cheesecake feels like the wildly moreish blend of a New York and a Basque cheesecake, while the churros – soft inside, and just crisp enough outside – are the best we've had outside of Spain.

Service
From the welcome staff at its grand entrance to the waitstaff, the team is warm and well-versed. Shout-out to Rumba for his exceptional advice. **BT**

VERDICT

A glossy take on Spanish cuisine that keeps things upscale without losing authenticity, and is stylish without losing substance.

HOURS

Monday to Friday, 5pm-late; Saturday, 12pm-2pm; Sunday, 5pm-1am

CONTACT

Hotel Boulevard, Autograph Collection, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Blvd in Downtown Dubai; +971 50 437 2238; tatelrestaurants.com

DRESS CODE

Smart elegant.

GOOD-TO-KNOW

The restaurant has a number of offers for different days of the week, including brunch every Saturday from 2pm to 6pm, a ladies' night every Wednesday from 8pm to 11pm, and a Tardeo (a Spanish happy hour) deal on Mondays to Fridays from 6pm to 8pm.

IMAGES **TATEL DUBAI**

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CEO, UAE, Middle East and Pakistan, Standard Chartered Bank
Gulf Business AWARDS 2025

***GULF BUSINESS* LEADER OF THE YEAR**
Rola Abu Manneh
CEO, UAE, Middle East and Pakistan,
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CEO, Imtiaz Developments

CROSS-BORDER BUSINESS ICON OF THE YEAR
Capt. Pradeep Singh
CEO and Founder,
Karma Realty Developers

DISRUPTIVE LEADER OF THE YEAR
Dr Ali Asgar Fakhruddin
CEO, Sterling Group

VISIONARY LEADER OF THE YEAR
Ankur Aggarwal
Chairman and Founder,
BNW Developments

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The Art Of The Drive

LAST MONTH, the BMW M5 Touring delivered a cinematic driving experience on the Isle of Man – an island in the Irish Sea, between Great Britain and Ireland, that is a self-governing British Crown Dependency – as part of its new campaign. The car – in a shade fittingly called Isle of Man Green – cut through brooding skies and winding roads with its 727 hp M Hybrid powertrain and signature M precision. During the journey, a stop called "Happy Dreams" – not an official landmark but one that symbolises a storybook-like interlude on a road trip – gave the jaunt a cinematic, emotional pause, during which the new in-car gaming feature (powered by AirConsole) could be played before the drive continued. The M5 Touring's blend of power, everyday luxury, and digital innovation have been described as a modern masterpiece. Intended to be more than just a car, the model aims to help people craft stories – not just of speed, but also of adventure and imagination on the open road. **BT**

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